

The nature and extent of mother tongue interference by Sepedi on the effectiveness of learning English among Information Technology foundation students at Tshwane University of Technology.

by

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the mother tongue interference by Sepedi and the impact of errors on the effectiveness of English learning among Information Technology (IT) foundation students at Tshwane University of Technology. To tackle problems with learning English, curriculum innovators need to develop English language intervention courses that are relevant for addressing the shortfalls in the of learning English among IT foundation students. In this study, I examine the errors relating to the students' English language skills.

The autobiographical essays that students were asked to write were used to investigate first language interference on second language and the errors that are transferred from the first language to the second language. Foundation students of Information Technology were chosen for this purpose because they are in an extended programme and do not qualify to be admitted to first year of study. Qualitative research methodologies were used in this study.

Accordingly, Students were used as the data collection population to reveal the extent of Sepedi interference and error transfer in English language learning. The data collected were analysed using descriptive and content analysis methods. The study addresses the central research question: "How do mother tongue interference and language errors influence the effectiveness with which English is learnt by IT foundation students at TUT?"

The study will make recommendations for the improvement of English language teaching and will provide a learning model that can be used in the future to improve the English Language skills of Information Technology students.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation “**The nature and extent of the mother tongue interference of Sepedi on the effectiveness of learning English among Information Technology students at Tshwane University of Technology**” is my own work and that all references have been properly cited and acknowledged according to departmental rules and regulations.

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CHAPTER 1

1. Background rationale, problem statement, research question and aim of the investigation

1.1 Introduction

In terms of section 29(2) of the South African Constitution, 1996, everyone has the right to receive education in either the official language or the language of their choice at public educational institutions where such education is reasonably applicable. Nevertheless, according to Toffelson (1991:201), in the South African educational context, English remains the language of choice as a medium of instruction (MOI).

The debate on language choice in teaching and learning dates back to 1965 when Corder identified and defined problems related to teaching and learning using a second language (L2). This chapter focuses on the choice of English as an MOI when the majority of students who enter universities in South Africa are not first language (L1) speakers of English.

The term “interference” is used to refer to errors in student writing that influence the degree of grammatical and syntactical proficiency. It was Corder in his article dated 1965 about the “significance of students’ errors” that the distinction was made between systematic and non-systematic errors. Unsystematic errors are language errors that occur in one’s native language, while systematic errors occur in an L2. This study analyses English L2 systematic errors in the writing of Information Technology (IT) foundation learners at the Soshanguve campus of the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) and how these errors affect English language proficiency.

Systematic errors are not regarded as gaps in learning but as productive tools to assist in the correction of errors in language learning. The main reason for justifying error analysis according to Lopez (1998:677) is language teaching. In the past, the formal methods of teaching that first considered errors in language learning regarded error analysis (EA) as evidence of *mislearning* a language.

1.2 Problem statement

English is used as the MOI for the majority of L2 black learners from primary schools through to higher education institutions. According to Schleppegrell and O'Halloran (2011), students in higher education make it difficult for lecturers to assist them in mastering English as they come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and because of their schooling backgrounds, these learners have varying levels of proficiency. Brown (2007:54) alludes to the fact that L2 learners of English will always struggle when they are taught in English. However, I concur with Şanal (2008) that language use, in both content and theory contexts, involves making errors.

The issue of the use of English especially at TUT is debatable because of the divergent ideas of grammatical English and academic English. A group of academics, for example believe that it is not important to teach students in IT and Engineering what they call grammatical English; students should rather be made to master academic English. This debate in the researcher's view is not valid since those who argue this point are themselves not linguists.

According to the enrolments records of TUT students, 98% of the learners in Foundation Information Technology at the Soshanguve campus are not first language speakers of English.

These students are admitted through a 1+3 model of study. One year spent in the foundation phase and three years on the national diploma. These students do not qualify to be admitted to the first year of study and one year is added in order to ground them in various soft skills before they are placed in level 1 of IT.

The Foundation course educators complain about the poor English proficiency of the students admitted to TUT and blame the schooling system for it especially the teaching of English at high schools. This observation of poor English proficiency among the students at TUT is confirmed by English proficiency assessments at TUT which are compulsory for all first-year students. For the past 11 years I have been involved in teaching and assessing English for foundation IT students at TUT. I also teach English for academic development across departments at TUT and my experience has revealed a wide range of language problems experienced by students when learning through the medium of English.

In addition, students' proficiency levels in English writing are low as has been observed from test and assignment scripts.

According to Lebowitz (2005:663), errors in English language learning will continue to affect the learners' writing because such writing is influenced by the transfer from their native language to L2. Mother tongue interference is a thorny issue in learning an L2 and the high rate of mother tongue interference in IT foundation classes is a major challenge to improving English proficiency skills. English language proficiency (ELP) not only plays a part in the educational discourse, but it plays also an important role in the professional success of individuals.

In Africa, many countries have declared English as the official language of communication, business and government legislation. In addition, major companies and institutions use English as the language of communication. This situation also prevails in South Africa, despite the fact that English is not the mother tongue of the majority of people in South Africa. Accordingly, the learners used in this study who are Sepedi speakers, are not proficient in English.

The MOI in this context is defined as the language through which university courses are taught and assessed. This study was prompted by the need to investigate why learners' written English is plagued by recurring systematic errors. The study looks learners' background in terms of their exposure to the English language prior to being admitted to TUT.

The students' language of communication outside the lecture hall is not English and most of them originate from rural areas with no libraries, electricity or proper sanitation. Even when students are proficient in English, scholars of linguistics like (Schleppegrell, 2011; Selinker 1992) make a distinction about English that requires learners to read, write, and interact with academic texts.

These authors refer to this language genre as academic language. Academic language focuses on discourse, lexical, and grammatical challenges. This matter of academic language brings to the fore the issue of investigating the English second language (ESL) students make and how those errors can be corrected.

One of the reasons for learners not being competent in English revolves around teacher qualifications in secondary schools, as a lack of qualifications in the teaching of English has a negative effect on proficiency in English.

English language proficiency may be problematic for L2 learners in the sense that the people who teach them L2 are not L1speakers of English. Erdoğan's view (2005:67), which supports the competency view of L2, is that native tongue learners' mistakes are part of the language acquisition process. Brown (2007:53) thus concludes in this respect that students' errors are inevitable and a natural part of student learning. The study submits that lecturers are an important part of the equation when dealing with errors.

1.2.1 What is error analysis?

Error analysis is defined by Erdoğan (2005:34) as a branch of applied linguistics that looks at the errors that L2 language speakers make in the process of learning the target language. Sometimes errors are referred to as "mistakes" or "interference". These errors are considered as being the result of mother tongue habits applied to the new language. The researcher' view is that error analysis encourages language learners to compare the native and the target language with the aim of explaining these errors. Corder, (1967:12) who has contributed immensely to error analysis writes;

"Error analysis is significant to teachers, to researchers and to learners. Studies concentrating on error categorization and analysis can be used to improve writing skills. The errors are facilitative and provide information about the students learning strategies and how L2 is acquired"

Earlier in this study it was mentioned that Corder introduced the dichotomy between errors and mistake and showed how these two interact in L2 acquisition. Error analysis (EA) should not be regarded as negative but rather as a critical pedagogical feedback tool.

Corder's view is that mistakes are not important for the process of language learning.

According to Corder (1975), errors are important in three ways; they show the teacher a student's progress which serves as a diagnostic tool, they show the researcher how language is acquired and the strategies the learners use; and lastly, they show the learners how they can learn from their mistakes. Gass and Selinker (1994:67) have shown that the teacher is a catalyst in assisting students to locate errors in written text. This issue of teachers being catalysts has always been linked with teacher qualifications and the levels of language proficiency of the teachers themselves.

Native language interference is regarded as nonsystematic and is loaded with L1 mistakes. When a student commits such an error, it is therefore important that the lecturer should not only give students answers, but also allow the students to discover and correct the errors.

1.2.2 The origin of errors

One of the significant reasons for doing error analysis (EA) is to whether there are errors to be corrected or not. According to Lott (1983:23), the origin of errors can be traced back to the mother tongue. This view is also held by Skiba (1997), who defines errors as native language interference in the target language. In addition, he defines interference as "the transfer of elements of one language into learning of another". Such transferred elements include phonological, grammatical, lexical and orthographical elements. Errors develop automatically as languages are acquired and learnt.

Krashen (1982) suggests five hypotheses for second language acquisition,; however this study looked at the acquisition-learning hypothesis with its claim that language ability is developed in two independent ways.

Firstly language acquisition is a subconscious process and occurs in a natural non-threatening environment. Generally, language errors in the natural setting are not immediately corrected as they might be in formal academic environments. Secondly, language learning occurs at school in an academic setting. Unlike language acquisition, this type of language learning is conscious. Errors often occur in this type of language learning because rules and grammar are what learning is all about. This study suggests that errors originated when humans started learning languages. The source of errors could be interlanguage which (Richards 1971) defines as mistakes that foreign language learners make because of the effect of their mother tongue.

1.2.3 Why do linguists do error analysis?

In the 1950's,behaviourism became the defining theory of language learning where language learning was described as habit formation and this was used to explain why L2 learners committed errors in written language. Corder (1973) states that “the most obvious use of error analysis is to the teachers”. Errors tell the teacher the following;

- the effectiveness of teaching materials
- the effectiveness of teaching itself
- the need for further attention especially the syllabus
- the level of language proficiency of the students.

As Corder postulated in 1973, everybody makes mistakes in both native and second language situations. Brown's view (1987) which is the other view stated in this study is that language errors are classified as both "overt" and "covert". Overt errors are defined as those errors that are completely ungrammatical at the sentence level, whereas covert errors are utterances that are grammatically well-formed at the sentence level, but are not interpretable within the context.

Corder (1973) supported by Ellis (1997) categorised errors as follows:

1. Omission - when a language learner omits some required element in a sentence
2. Addition - addition of an unnecessary or incorrect element
3. Selection - of an incorrect element
4. Ordering - misordering of the elements

Ellis (1997) maintains that if linguists classify errors in this way, it will assist teachers to easily diagnose their students' learning problems.

1.3 Research aim

The purpose of this study was to investigate the nature and extent of mother tongue interference by Sepedi language in the ELP of foundation phase students of Information Technology at the Tshwane University of Technology Soshanguve campus in 2012.

The information collected will assist both academic practitioners and languages practitioners in designing language proficiency programmes to address issues of L1 language interference in English language proficiency.

The study aimed to investigate the influence of mother tongue interference on the effectiveness English learning among IT foundation students, and to establish the extent of Sepedi interference in ELP.

1.4 Research question

The study aimed to answer the following question:

Does mother tongue interference have an influence on the effectiveness of English learning among IT foundation students at TUT?

1.5 Value of the research

The general aim of the study was to isolate and describe the specific issues related to mother tongue interference (errors) that have an influence on the effective learning of English. The majority of learners in this study are not first language speakers of English; it will be interesting for this study in defining mother tongue in relation to the target language. It is hoped that the results that the results will enable the researcher to formulate proposals that may assist in improving the English language proficiency of IT foundation students at TUT. It should be noted that TUT's language department deals with the linguistic aspects of languages rather than the study of English as a subject across the curriculum.

1.6 Delimitations of the study

Foundation phase students from the Faculty of Information and Communication Technology were used as the population for this study. It is therefore not possible to generalise the results to all the students at the TUT Soshanguve campus in all the faculties.

1.7 Research procedure

The research procedure comprised of a combination of a literature review and an autobiographical text analysis of assignment scripts. A sample of written work was collected from 98 IT foundation students. These students were taken from two classes located at the Soshanguve South campus. These students represent three major language groups in the IT faculty, namely Sepedi, Setswana and isiZulu. I focused on Sepedi group because they were in the majority in the sampled classes and I added Setswana because it is structurally similar to Sepedi.

I collected 196 pieces of work from the 98 students (two full written pages from each student). I obtained written permission from the TUT ethics committee to conduct the study and I also requested the students to give me their consent to use their assignment for research purposes. The study made use of a qualitative method. Grant (1992:24) describes a qualitative method as an approach that examines the causes of behaviours in observable events, while Denzin and Lincoln (2003:3) have shown that a qualitative design enables the researcher to study actions in an organised setting.

Accordingly, assignments with an autobiographical focus were selected using purposive sampling and an analysis was conducted on the assignments selected.

The researcher studied errors in the following manner;

1. Identify the errors.
2. Identify areas of language errors.
3. Ascertain the frequency of the errors.
4. Ascertain how to correct the errors.

1.8 Clarification of Terms

1.8.1 Error

According to Lott (1983), errors happen when the mother tongue interferes with the structural rules of the target language. Corder (1974), on the other hand, defines errors as systematic deviations from the structure and norms of the language being learned.

1.8.2 Interference

Interference is defined as the automatic transfer, as a result of habit, of the surface structure of the first language (Bhela 1999:22). Lott (1983:256) defines interference as those “errors in the learner’s use of foreign language” that may be traced back to the mother tongue.

There are two types of mother tongue interference according to Long (1982:11); firstly there is interlingual interference which means that L1 habits (patterns, systems or rules) interfere or prevent the learner from acquiring the patterns and rules of the L2. Secondly, there is intralingual interference, which refers to errors caused by the interference of the L2 itself. This study focused on interlingual interference.

1.8.3 Proficiency

“Proficiency” means different things to different people. In this study, the focus was on academic language proficiency which includes knowledge of less frequent vocabulary as well as the ability to interpret and produce complex written (and oral) language (Cummins 2001:65). Academic language proficiency (ALP) is what students require to understand linguistically and conceptually demanding texts in content areas such as mathematics, science and computer studies.

In this study, ALP is viewed as a tool for obtaining high success rate especially in the context of English as the language used in educational discourse.

1.8.4 Autobiography

“Autobiography” is a term that refers to a self-written account of a person’s life. It is described as a series of paradoxes: fact and fiction, private and communal, lessons and lies (Berryman 1999:71).

On the other hand Zuber-Skerrit (1998:54), defines the term “autobiography” as a piece of writing that contains information about the self where an important and expected aspect of much research is a reflection of one’s own practice. Furthermore, this author defines “autobiography” as a history of a person’s life written or told by that person as a literary genre. In this study, sampled wrote autobiographical essays with the aim of establishing how effective students write in English as a measure of proficiency.

1.8.5 Transfer

Transfer is seen by Cook (2008:71) as the treatment by learners of the L2 sounds as equivalent to the sounds of the L1. As mentioned earlier in this study, this dissertation seeks to explore what Erdogan call interlingual transfer. Interlingual transfer is defined as language transfer that is caused by the learner’s L1. Interlingual transfer occurs at different levels such as the transfer of phonological, morphological, grammatical and lexica-semantic elements of the native language to the target language. Lopez (2008) defines language transfer as an attribute of learning a second language and it happens because of the interaction with the mother tongue. In this instance, learners produce forms that are not a consequence of interference with their mother tongue but because of their exposure to the target language or what scholars like Corder (1974) and Selinker (1972) call the sociolinguistic situation.

1.8.6 Medium of instruction (Language of Discourse)

The medium of instruction (MOI) is the language medium which is chosen to be used for teaching and learning in a particular institution. In simple terms, it is the language used by the teacher to teach.

The language used as an MOI, may or may not be the official language of the country or territory and is used as part of schooling (Grant 1999:53). In Africa, for example, the MOI of the majority of African children is the language of their colonial masters rather than their L1.

Cook (2008:156) refers to the MOI as the language of the classroom. This language of the classroom comprises three levels;

- Initiation, which implies proper introduction of students in a linguistic setting.
- Response, which means that students get involved so that teachers are able to see the level of language proficiency,(this level of classroom move has a diagnostic dimension attached to it).
- Feedback, which is the stage of language intervention where errors are recognised and corrected.

1.8.7 Interlanguage

According to Cook (2008:13), “one view of L2 learning sees crucial elements as the transfer of aspects of the L1 language to the L2. In the case of Sepedi/Setswana, which was used in this study, L1 assist students when the language components of the L2 are similar.

Selinker (1972) sees interlanguage as a temporary grammar which L2 learners invent for themselves. Figure 1.1 below defines interlanguage:

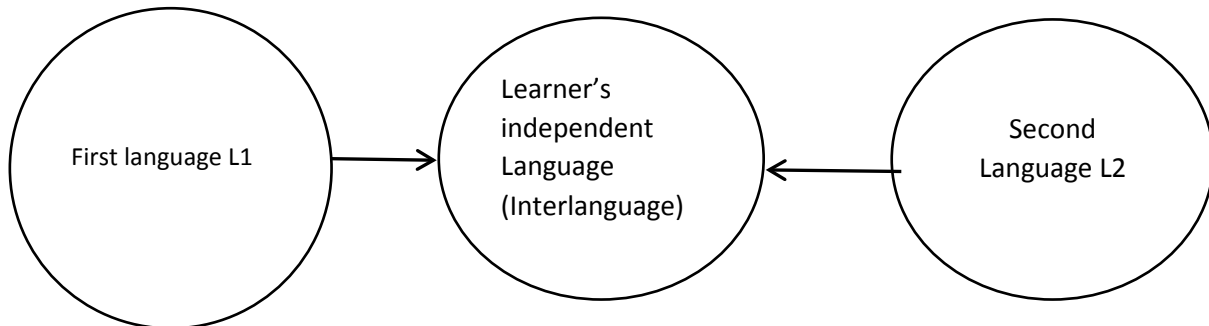


Figure 1.1 Interlanguage

In Selinker's opinion, interlanguage is a sign that students do not understand the rules of the L2. He maintains that interlanguage proves that students reflect their temporary language system rather than their imperfect grasp of the target language. Interlanguage is not the 'language' learners have been taught but their independent language that they use because of gaps in mastering the target language.

Research involving students' assignments with an autobiographical focus

According to Busse, Ehses and Zech (2002:2), collective research in autobiography is a qualitative method that involves working on autobiographical text materials in a research group.

This methodology allows the researcher to analyse patterns with written texts of different orders and quality. In this autobiographical research, errors in the autobiographical text material were analysed. In this study, the term “content” relates primarily to the linguistic content of the autobiographical text materials that were given to students as an assignment. Despite the fact that other writers give different definitions of error analysis or textual analysis, the meaning of the concept remains the same.

Webber (1990) defines error analysis as a type of secondary data analysis which is used to analyse texts in order to see what errors exist and their actual meaning. Babbie (2004) defines error analysis as “the study of recorded human communications and the flaws it contains”. On the other hand, Krippendorff (2004) defines the term as any analysis where communication content (written and oral) is categorised and classified. Lopez’s view is that error analysis is a method which allows linguists to determine how languages are learned. Corder (1974) suggests three steps in the study of EA: recognition, description and explanation. Corder maintains that it would be futile to undertake any study on error analysis if scholars fail to clarify all the necessary questions.

This study attempts to recognise errors from students’ written work and try to clarify why those errors occur. Accordingly, errors written texts will be analysed. For the purpose of this study, text implies the assignment scripts of IT foundation phase learners who registered for the first time in 2012. In addition, these students are non-mother tongue speakers of English. In most cases the majority of these learners were taught by teachers in Grade 12 who were themselves second language speakers of English.

1.9 Envisaged chapter allocation

Chapter 1 described the aim of the study, stated the research problem and defined the terms used.

Chapter 2 will discuss the theoretical framework of the research. In this chapter the main concepts, assumptions and principles applied in the study will be defined.

Chapter 3 will describe the research methodology used in the research study.

Chapter 4 will present the data collected

Chapter 5 will provide an analysis and interpretation of the data as well as the findings as they relate to the research question

Chapter 6 will contain the conclusions reached and make recommendations for the development of English language proficiency.

CHAPTER 2

2. Theoretical framework and literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an extensive literature review which includes among other things, books, policies, journals and research articles on the same issue under study. The purpose of the review is to examine, among other things, the definitions of error analysis, interlanguage, second language acquisition, language transfer, second language learning and teaching, and mother tongue interference.

2.2 Second language learning

Before further information is provided in the study, it would be inappropriate to lay out a theoretical framework for the study without first acknowledging that errors and mistakes in language use are there because of second language learning. It should be noted that the majority of students who are registered in the IT foundation course, are (ESL) students.

Cook (2008:2) refers to the term *second language* (L2) as a language acquired by a person in addition to their mother tongue.

On the hand, Saville-Troike (2006:4) defines second language as an official or society dominant language needed for education, employment, and other basic purposes.

It was Macaro (2003) who clarified the fact that for adult learners to be competent in L2; two processes are very important, namely how L2 is learned and acquired. Second language acquisition (SLA) has been a focal area of language research for years. (SLA) began as an interdisciplinary field and two contributions to this field regard linguists as being instrumental in the development of SLA: Pit Corder's 1967 essay "*The significance of learner's errors*", and Larry Selinker's 1972 article "*interlanguage*".

Saville-Troike (2006: 2) refers to SLA as the study of individuals and groups who are learning a language subsequent to learning their first one, and to the process of learning that language. However, it was Krashen's definition of SLA which became the basis for work by subsequent researchers

Krashen (1982:12) defines second language acquisition as follows:

"Second language acquisition is a process by which people learn a second language. This process does not only involve learning the language, but it also devoted to studying that process".

This definition highlights the argument relating to the difference between acquisition and learning. Linguists make an important distinction between the two concepts.

According to Haynes (1998), language acquisition takes place when children acquire language through a subconscious process during which they are unaware of grammatical rules. This is similar to the way L1 is acquired. Language acquisition refers to acquiring language in a natural communication context. On the other hand, Haynes defines language learning as direct instruction in the rules of language. Unlike in language acquisition, in language learning students have conscious knowledge of the new language.

Brown (2007:9), defines learning as “showing or helping someone to learn how to do something, giving instruction, causing to know or understand”.

It should be noted that SLA differs from first language acquisition (FLA). L2 is not learned in a natural setting but in a formal academic setting where errors or mistakes are often corrected by the teacher. In South Africa, the majority of second language speakers of English learn the language officially when they enter formal schooling. These learners are already fluent in their L1 which they acquired from infancy through to their early school years. L2 should thus not be regarded as just the transfer of the L1. Cook (2008:13) popularised the idea that learning an L2 is in fact different from acquiring an L1 because when learners acquire L1, they do not have any other language base.

In this regard, the difference resides in the fact that when learning an L2, learners already have one language (L1) present in their minds. This issue of one language in their minds makes it difficult to learn a second language without using linguistic features of the L1. An L2 learner is different from a child acquiring an L1.

Very often children learn L2 in day care, in contrast to the L1 which is acquired against a loving family background (Lightbown and Spada 2006:29).

Saville-Troike (2006:16) divided both L1 and L2 language learning into three phases: the initial state, the intermediate state and the final state. The three phases are discussed below:

Initial state

This state is the first stage in language acquisition because it includes all the underlying knowledge about language structures and principles that are in the learners' heads at the very start of L1 or L2 acquisition. The child's L1 competence is based on innate capacity whereas L2 competence is based on interaction with people who possess the mastery of that language such as in an academic/learning environment. It was Brown (2007) who suggested the idea that learning cannot happen if teaching is not done professionally.

Intermediate state

The development of language is systematic. In the researchers' experience of teaching in a language classroom, language development cannot happen unless the learners play a creative role. Language input in both L1 and L2 is essential if learning is to take place.

Brown's view is that teaching is important but this importance is limited because it is also the learner's responsibility to learn a language through their practice of the practical rules of those languages.

Final state

This refers to the outcomes of L1 or L2 learning. According to Freed (1995:245), L2 learning in particular varies according to the level of learners' exposure to the target language and the levels of proficiency in learners differ from one to the next. Freed holds the view that although L2 learning may be taught by highly qualified teachers, the learners will never reach the competence of native speakers of the language.

The final state of language learning is what language researchers have concentrated on for years because it is in this state that, once L2 learners experience instances of L1 interference, or mistakes occur.

Moreover, learners often show a persistent lack of change in language competence even after extended exposure to instruction in the target language. This is known as fossilisation. This term will be explained in detail in the section of interlanguage.

Language learning is a process and therefore it is also developmental. Over the years linguists have explained language development in terms of three main theoretical positions; namely behaviourism, innatism and cognitive/developmental and sociocultural perspective.

The behaviourist perspective:

The behaviourist perspective was pioneered by B.F Skinner in the 1950's. According to this perspective, linguists define learning in terms of imitation, practice, reinforcement, and habit formation. Lightbown and Spada (2006: 34) emphasise the audio-lingual method of second language teaching, which emerged from behaviourism and was popular between the 1940's and 1970's. Furthermore, Vivian Cook (2003) and others point out that learning a language is a process of habit formation. The view is that the habits of L1 will interfere with the new habits of L2 that the learner wants to form, this, termed the "contrastive hypothesis".

Innatist perspective:

This perspective supports the view that humans in general are born with innate knowledge of the principles of universal grammar (UG). UG allows all children to acquire L1 during a critical period of their development. However, in this acquisition-learning hypothesis, Krashen (1994:17) suggested in his that humans acquire L2 in the way that children pick up their first language, that is children pick up L1 with no conscious attention to language form. Adults, on the other hand 'learn' an L2 through conscious attention to language form. Krashen's model is one of the models that adopts an innatist perspective and emphasises the role of exposure to input in L2 acquisition.

Cognitive/developmental perspective:

Since the 1990's, psychological theories have become part of research in L2 development. Cognitive/developmental theorists were convinced that learning is achieved through attention to any aspect of language. Norman Segalowitz (2003) and others support this view by adding that learners have to pay attention at first to any aspect of language views they may use their cognitive resources to process information.

Ellis (2002:41) emphasises Krashen's view that the frequency with which learners encounter specific linguistic features in the input and the frequency with which features occur together is what makes L2 acquisition development fast. This does not however exclude the fact that the proficiency levels of learners in L2 will never be the same as in L1.

Ellis's emphasis brings to mind the competition model suggested by Longress (1990), which describe language acquisition that takes into account not only language form but also the meaning and use of language. Dimbley and Burton (1998:93) support Ellis when they say that "language is used in the learning context to generate meaning".

This type of language use is a fundamental need in high formal function contexts (including tertiary institutions). Dimbley and Burton's view brings the issue of academic language into the picture. L2 learning is, of course, a fundamental process if the target language is used in the classroom situation. Longress (1990:449) defines cognition as a thinking ability that allows students to attend, learn, think and reason. In this instance, L2 learning is seen as the learning of skills.

Socio-cultural perspective:

Cognitive development and language development happen because of social interaction. According to the socio-cultural perspective, L2 learners learn a language when they collaborate and interact with other speakers. Through collaborative dialogue, learners construct knowledge while engaging in both form and meaning. This is both a cognitive and a social activity (Cook 2001:242). Accordingly, L2 learning cannot be alienated from the social context of language.

The majorities of students at TUT are second language speakers of English and have had little or no exposure to the language itself and this poses a challenge when learning the second language. Webb (2005:15) maintains that language does not just happen; it needs certain cognitive, perceptual, social, and communicative skills. The languages used by the population in the study were not used as official languages of South Africa before 1994. Moreover, the only reason that learners are exposed to English is because it is used as the MOI and, thus, they have no choice but to learn the language.

The problem in South Africa at the moment is that English, and to a lesser extent Afrikaans, are the only languages capable of functioning fully as languages of learning and teaching at higher education institutions. According to the 2005 TUT draft language policy, Setswana can be used as a language of teaching and learning, but it does not have the terminology and has not been standardised to function in high functioning contexts. For the purpose of this study, it is important to make a distinction between native (L1) transfers and L2 transfers because the learners' whose use of language was analysed are black South Africans studying English as a second language at a South African institution of higher education.

2.3 Language interference/negative transfer

“Language interference” is defined by Saville-Troike (2006:200) as the inappropriate influence of an L1 structure or rule on L2 use.

This is also referred to as “negative transfer”. The term “language interference” and “negative transfer” will be used in this study interchangeably in this study. “Transfer” is a general term describing the carryover of previous performance or knowledge to subsequent learning. Transfer should not be viewed as always being negative. Positive transfer occurs when the prior knowledge benefits the learning task – that is, when the previous rule or item of the L2 is correctly applied to present subject matter.

Beardsmore (1964) suggests that the difficulties an L2 learner experiences with the phonology, vocabulary and grammar of L2 are due to the interference of habits from the L1. Hence the relationship between the two languages must be considered if teachers want to diagnose and remedy L1 interference on L2.

Studies on L2 learning have shown that L1 has interfering effects on L1 on the L2. Pit Corder (1975) is of the view that L1 interference is a noticeable source of errors among L2 learners. The problem with linguists is that they often view L2 learning as exclusively involving overcoming the effects of L1. In certain instances L1 is negatively transferred, and, thus linguists say interference has occurred. For example a Sepedi/Setswana speaker might say in English “The learners they attended classes today” this is a logical transfer of the comparable Sepedi/Setswana sentence.

Because of the transfer of the Sepedi/Setswana pronoun to English, the Sepedi/Setswana language system has interfered with the person's production of the correct English form. However, sometimes it is not about negative transfer but about overgeneralisation.

According to Brown (2007:104), overgeneralisation is the incorrect application or negative transfer of previously learned L2 material to a present L2. It is therefore a misconception to think that overgeneralisation and interference are negative counterparts of facilitating processes of transfer and generalisation.

2.4 Error analysis

Error analysis was established in the 1960's by Stephen Pit Corder and colleagues. It was regarded as an alternative to contrastive analysis because contrastive analysis it was found to be unable to predict a great majority of errors.

Erdoğan (2005) defines error analysis as a branch of applied linguistics that emerged in the 1960's to demonstrate that learner errors were not simply because of the learner's native language but also a reflection of some universal learning strategies.

2.4.1 Definition of errors (analysis)

Saville-Troike (2006:40), defines error analysis (EA) as the first approach to the study of SLA.

It includes an internal focus on learner's ability to construct language creatively. The method is based on the analysis of learner errors in the L2. It Corder (1981) initially suggested that error analysis is the process of looking at the differences between the learner's speech and that of the native speaker.

Initially, the basis on which error analysis was done was confusing and it was Brown (1993:205), supporting Corder (1967), who differentiated between 'mistakes' and 'errors'. He defined mistakes as performance errors and errors as noticeable deviation reflecting the competence of the learner. Corder introduced the distinction between errors (in competence) and mistakes (in performance).

In Corder's case, mistakes are not significant for the process of language learning. Ellis (1997) supports Corder in this regard by adding that errors reflect gaps in the learner's knowledge and they occur because the learner does not know what is correct. Mistakes reflect occasional lapses in performance and they occur because, in a particular instance, the learner is unable to perform what they know. Before the 1970's contrastive analysis (CA) was used as a tool to correct errors in SLA by predicting and explaining learner problems based on a comparison of the L1 and the L2 to determine similarities and difference (Saville-Troike 2006:36). Saville-Troike is convinced that in the early 1970's, EA replaced CA because of the following developments:

- Predictions made by CA did not always materialise in actual learner errors. The view was that many real learner errors could not be attributed to transfer from the L1 to the L2.

- The exclusive focus on surface-level forms and patterns by structural linguists shifted to a concern for underlying rules.
- The emphasis on the innate capacity of the language learner rather than on external influences.
- L2 learning came to be thought of as being to some extent independent of L2 teaching and researchers began to separate issues in SLA from pedagogical concerns. Learning processes became an important focus for study in their own right.

Noam Chomsky in introducing transformative generative grammar in the 1960's, claimed that languages have a small number of essential rules which account for their basic sentence structures, as well as transformational rules which allow basic sentences to be modified (by deletions, additions, substitutions, and changes in word order). In Chomsky's view, knowing a language was a matter of rules rather than the memorisation of surface structures.

Corder's influential publication (1967) on "learner errors" launched "error analysis" as an approach in SLA which called on applied linguists to focus on L2 learners' errors as sources of insight into the learning process. Attention is given to errors because Corder regarded errors as systematic deviations made by the learner who has not yet mastered the rules of the target language. At that point the learner's knowledge of the language is such that they are not able to correct the errors and therefore this shows the current stage of L2 development (Larsen, 1992:59).

According to Rustipa (2010), language errors can be divided into three sub-categories, overgeneralisation, incomplete rule application, and the hypothesising of false concepts. The methodology of error analysis always follows certain steps including the collection of data, the identification of errors, the classification of errors, estimating the frequency of errors, the analysis of errors and the actual error analysis.

2.4.2 Significance of error analysis

“One of the justifications and the significance of studying error analysis is that a good understanding of the nature of error is necessary before a systematic means of eradicating them could be found” (Corder 1973). Both Corder (1976) and Erdoğan (2005) see errors as a developmental tool rather than a negative one. Accordingly, the correction of these errors assists learners in becoming proficient in English.

The study of errors is significant in three ways:

- **For the teacher:** Errors show a student’s progress. They assist teachers to devise proper strategies which learners find productive in language learning. Errors allow the teacher to pinpoint areas of English where learners go wrong for various reasons. In this way the teacher will know which of their learner’s native language systems is interfering with the learning of English. Errors allow the teacher to diagnose learning problems in individual learners. Corder (1973) concludes that all the information that the teacher gathers from the errors that learners make, will equip teachers to devise better remedial measures.

Corder (1973) concludes that all the information that the teacher gathers from the errors that learners make, will equip them to devise better remedial measures.

- **For the researcher:** Errors show how a language is acquired, and the strategies the learner uses. The researcher may consequently be helpful in developing teaching materials for dealing with errors.
- **For the learner:** Learners can learn from their errors (Richards, Plott and Platt 1992). The correction of these errors helps learners to acquire the correct forms of the target language.

Corder further advises teachers that when a learner has made an error, they should be allowed to correct themselves; to think about the error and test different hypotheses. The other important significance of error analysis, as proposed by (Carroll 1955, in Corder) is that the learner should find the correct linguistic form by searching for it. It can thus be inferred that language teaching cannot disregard error analysis.

As mentioned earlier, L2 learners make different errors at different times. Consequently, learner errors are significant indicators for teachers to design appropriate syllabus and for test developers to assess areas where learners need to improve. Recognition of different errors will in turn assist educators to devise appropriate materials and effective teaching techniques.

Teachers of languages are aware of the constant errors that learners make and they can use those errors as tools for learning. Errors occur because L2 learners have not acquired sufficient knowledge about the target language. (Selinker, 1992 in Ho, 2003).

The identification of errors is significant because once identified, language learners can, with the help of their teachers correct their errors until they have sufficient knowledge of the rules of L2.

Brown (1993:219) submits that one of the keys to successful learning is the feedback that a learner receives from others. Lightbown and Spada (2006:134) supported Spada suggest in this regard that the feedback that learners receive should not be punitive but rather corrective. They found that learners incorporate corrective feedback in their subsequent production of the L2 and the level of errors decreases with practice.

An important part of feedback is what is termed “cognitive feedback”. Cognitive feedback is a type of feedback that avoids too many negative comments from the teacher. Accordingly the task of the teacher is to provide enough green lights to encourage communication. What teachers should avoid is punitive reinforcement or correction that is seen by learners as dehumanizing (Rustipa 2010). The central issues in this study are language interference and error analysis. The significance of error analysis in this regard is in terms of improving the levels of proficiency in the target language. Cummins (2001:65), states that when errors are significantly eliminated, the following levels of L2 fluency will be achieved;

- **Conversational fluency** which is defined as the ability to carry on a conversation in familiar face-to-face situations. Native speakers develop this kind of proficiency when they enter schools at age seven.

- **Discrete language skills.** These reflect specific phonological, literacy and grammatical knowledge that learners acquire as a result of direct instruction in both formal and informal practice.
- **Academic language proficiency** is the level of proficiency that language teachers want to achieve. The significance of error analysis in this regard is to assist learners to understand linguistically and conceptually complex texts in content areas such as mathematics, science, and computer studies.

In the context of this study learners should be able to use academic language proficiently in order to perform in the L2 which in this case is English.

2.4.3 Sources of errors

One of the burning questions that have been troubling me as a researcher is, where do errors come from?. Brown (2007:23) views the sources of errors as arising from the learning of the language itself. His view is that when learning an L2 it is natural for learners to first apply their knowledge of their native language to the target language. Sources of error can thus be interlanguage or intralanguage. For learners who are at the beginning stages of learning an L2, negative (interlingual) transfer is a significant source of errors. Lott (1983) defines interlingual errors as those errors in the learner's foreign language that can be traced back to the mother tongue.

Corder (1975) meanwhile claims that many interlingual errors are due to the learner using structures from their native language. Bulgaria (2001) agrees with Corder (1975), Brown (2007) and Lott (1983) that learner errors should be categorised as either interlingual or intralingual errors.

For Corder (1975), the possession of one's native language is not inhibitory but facilitative in the sense that errors are evidence of one's learning strategies and progress in acquiring an L2. Brown's (2007) view is that once learners have begun to acquire parts of the new language system, there will be more intralingual transfer. Accordingly these kinds of errors are caused by the target language.

A typical example of an intralingual error is the overgeneralisation of the plural form of the word "children". In Sepedi/Setswana speakers the majority of learners of English would say "childrens", thus adding an "s" as the plural form to the already correct word "children".

Richards (1971) distinguishes four types of intralingual errors;

1. Overgeneralization
2. Ignorance of rule restriction
3. Incomplete application of rule
4. False hypothesizing of concepts

Errors that stem from intralingual transfer, shows the teacher that the learners have moved out of the beginning stages of learning an L2. This is what Corder (1975) refers to as the benefit of studying learner errors in SLA.

Hence the study of errors has the benefit of teachers are aware of the progress made by their learners in acquiring L2.

A third significant source of learner errors especially in the South African context is inferior classroom materials and the fact that L2 teachers of English also make such errors. At TUT, English is mainly taught by either black lecturers or Afrikaans speaking lecturers. These types of errors are called “induced errors” (Brown 2007:87).

Lee (1990), states that it is difficult to identify sources of errors until they are classified. He elaborates on the following classification of learner errors,

- Grammatical (morphosyntactic) errors are those errors which stress the need for grammatical accuracy in both speech and writing. Errors at the sentence level reflect performance “mistakes” for which immediate teacher correction may not be necessarily appropriate.
- *Discourse errors* depend on the observance of the rules of speaking and writing and reflect learners’ cultural and pragmatic knowledge of language use.
- *Phonologically-induced errors* are manifested in wrong pronunciation and/or intonation. If they are not timeously corrected, they may have a meaning-differentiating function as, for example, in live/leave.

- *Lexical errors* are errors which occur in combination with errors belonging to other linguistic levels.

2.4.4 When and how to correct errors

While the study of error correction is central to error analysis, it is up to the teachers of language to know when the appropriate time to correct errors is and how to correct errors. According to an article by Brown (2007) entitled “*Error correction theory and practice in the ESL classroom*”, one of the criteria when deciding to correct errors is to ascertain whether those errors are global or local.

Rustipa’s (2010) view is that language teachers should not always correct learner errors in every contact session, but should only correct those errors that appear regularly because errors are sometimes devices that learners use to learn. Further, Brown (2007) maintains that local errors do not prevent the message from being heard, because they are usually a minor violation of one segment of a sentence. Erdoğan (2005) submits in this regard that the concern for language teachers should be how they correct their learners. The technique for correcting such errors is to allow learners to see for themselves the errors they have committed and how with the assistance of the teachers to correct such errors.

In 2005 Erdoğan came up with the idea of over-learning. This occurs when a learner goes through the same set of drills under the guise of correcting errors.

One of the most important issues when correcting errors should be that the teacher understands the sources of errors, and is able to provide appropriate guidance for the learners so that they are able to discover the relevant rules they have violated.

Corder (1973) states that the knowledge of teachers about the learners' errors is the starting point for correcting those errors appropriately. Skill in correction of errors is what is important if errors are to be eliminated from the learners' L2 learning.

Rustipa's (2010) view that only regular errors should be corrected is challenged by Corder (1973) who argues that a hierarchy of errors should be established regardless of whether they are local or global. He accordingly maintains that errors should be corrected according to their nature and significance. In such a hierarchy Corder believes that priority should be given to errors that may affect communication and cause misunderstanding. In adding to this notion, Brown (2007) suggests that local errors need to be corrected immediately. However, error correction is influenced by the knowledge of the teacher. Error correction is a learning curve even for lecturers because as L2 speakers of English it is questionable whether these lecturers will achieve the proficiency of L1 speakers of English.

This researcher is of the view that all errors should be corrected hence all higher education institutions should be concerned with what has been referred to earlier as "academic language" rather than communicative language. Brown (2007) suggests that a useful tool for error correction would be a theory for error treatment. Vigil and Oller (1976) maintain that cognitive feedback must be optimal in order to be effective.

Rustipa (2010) supports Vigil and Oller (1976) by adding that too much negative cognitive feedback creates a barrage of interruptions, corrections and overt attention to malformations and this type of negative cognitive feedback often leads to learners shutting off in their attempt to communicate.

Hofstede (2001) developed a theory of risk aversion as caused by negative cognitive feedback. In South Africa, high risk aversion in a society is defined as a society where people are afraid to be wrong. This high uncertainty avoidance ranking infers that there is low tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. Brown (1993) makes the suggestion that one of the keys to successful learning lies in the feedback that the learner receives from others.

In the researcher's experience of teaching a language class, the task of the teacher is seen to be discerning between positive and negative feedback. While contrastive analysis is criticised for failing to predict all learner errors, error analysis is criticised for misdiagnosing student learning problems owing to their "avoidance" of certain difficult L2 elements. Error correction methods should not place all responsibility on the students in this regard because they make such errors as a result of insufficient correct information about the target language. The notion of punitive reinforcement was neglected by language teachers for years because their aim was to correct learner errors without looking at the effect of their action on the learners. Cook (2008:157) adds to this argument by saying that the L2 teaching classroom is unique in the sense that the organisation and control of the classroom takes place through an L2.

The matter of negative cognitive feedback brings the issue of teacher qualifications and skills to the fore.

Most of the language research on error analysis places the teacher at the centre of error correction because errors can be corrected by someone who has no knowledge of the target language. Arguments about teacher qualifications and skills in relation to error correction are viewed by (Carroll 1955, in Corder) as the most important element in error correction.

Research on error analysis does not conclusively agree about the most effective method or technique for error correction. Corder (1965) maintains that it depends on what teachers aim to correct and that learner error is inevitable and a natural part of student learning. By correctly interpreting the source of student errors, teachers can gain meaningful knowledge about the students learning processes and their L2 knowledge deficiencies.

2.4.5 Shortfalls in error analysis

EA has been criticised for both methodological and theoretical reasons. Linguists like Meyer (2002) believe that the glorification of EA as the perfect tool of correcting learner errors in SLA has been overemphasised. Ellis (2003) criticises EA because the majority of teachers exhibited weaknesses in error evaluation judgments, lacked precision in defining the point of view under which an utterance is considered erroneous, had difficulty in finding the interlingual or intralingual source of error, and were unable to classify and interpret errors correctly. Accordingly, he maintains that EA does not provide a complete idea of learners in terms of their competence and performance.

Lopez (1998) who submits in this regard that for EA to be effective, it needs to study both erroneous and non-erroneous forms.

Another criticism advanced by Ellis (2003) is in the SLA and refers to the cross-sectional nature of research studies (in opposition to longitudinal studies). Ellis believes that EA cannot explain the development of the learner during their process of acquiring an L2 since analysis is done on a static text.

Research has provided empirical evidence pointing to learner errors as effective means of improving grammatical accuracy (Bless and Higson-Smith 2000), however, the limitation on EA is a result of learners' tendency to avoid structures they believe to be erroneous and use those structures they consider to be correct. The problem with this kind of limitation is that if learners always avoid what they believe to be erroneous, their learning of the target language will be limited because all structures should be learned and be corrected.

The other criticism that this study will raise is about the objective of error correction which seems to adhere to norms set by applied linguist of the past rather than looking at the current issues of error analysis. This study is not only concerned with studying and defining learner errors, but will also attempt to define those errors in relation to strategies that learners develop as they acquire an L2. While language teachers are geared to eliminating these errors, Lopez (1998) considered the gradual modification of these error patterns to be evidence of effective learning.

As mentioned earlier, why are linguists concerned about correcting errors? Selinker (1972:150) submits that it is because learner correction improves grammatical accuracy.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) state that EA misses on two things; The first one is the *correct* forms the learner produces and to keep track of the system behind both correct and incorrect productions of form, and the second is avoidance in terms of which learners who have difficulty with certain structures may find ways to avoid producing them.

The other challenge here is that teachers will generally only correct errors related to what they are teaching in class that day. Since I started teaching at TUT 11 years ago, I have realised that language classes do not deal with what I term general errors but specific errors. By specific errors I mean if teachers are busy teaching tense, for example, there is a tendency to neglect word order errors for that day since it is not part of the lesson. It should be noted that teachers will prioritise the correction of some errors and not others because of the class syllabus.

One of the problems at TUT, has been the question of the language components that language teachers should teach. EA is used to examine errors as a way of investigating learning processes. However, academics at TUT criticize this approach, saying that IT students are not language learners, but rather use language to study learning content and therefore they do not need to study the grammar rules of the target language.

According to Webb (2005:6), only 25% of black South Africans are functionally literate in English and that presents certain challenges if the majority of these black learners are to study in English.

If learners' errors are to be corrected every time they attend class, it means they are regarded as language learners even though they in fact are not.

Finally, it would be incorrect to look at the “wrongs” of EA without acknowledging its contribution to understanding important facts about SLA as well as supporting language pedagogy. It should be noted though that what is important in when doing EA is to define the objectives and the setting of the analysis area. The danger paying too much attention to learner errors is that it may cause the correct utterances in the L2 to go unnoticed.

2.4.6 Interlanguage

This study would be incomplete if it were not to look at “interlanguage” in SLA. This study defines the concept, but, is nevertheless interested in evaluating interlanguage in SLA. The term was first used by John Reinecke in 1935 to refer to a nonstandard variety of an L1 or L2 used as a means of intergroup communication. In the 1970's Corder and other scholars began using the term “Interlanguage”. In language studies, linguists conclude that many utterances produced by learners that were ungrammatical are now seen as interlanguage. Ellis (1989:135) sees interlanguage as dynamic concept constantly adapting to new information and is being influenced by the learners.

Selinker (1972) defines interlanguage as a developed L2. This developed L2 is influenced by previously acquired or learned languages. Interlanguage is simply the knowledge of two languages in one mind.

This possession of two languages influences language learning in two ways; firstly language helps the learner when it has elements in common with the second language and secondly it hinders them when they differ. The learning of the target language may be influenced by the knowledge of the L1.

There are important characteristics that define interlanguage as a “middle” language.

Ellis (1994:351) quotes Selinker’s idea about the characteristics of interlanguage as follows;

- Language transfer (some, but not all, items, rules, and subsystems of a learner’s interlanguage may be transferred from the first language).
- Transfer of training (some interlanguage elements may derive from the way in which the learners were taught).
- Strategies of second language learning (Selinker talks about an identifiable approach by the learner to the material to be learned).
- Strategies of second language communication (an identifiable approach by the learner to communication with native speakers of the target language).
- Overgeneralisation of the target language material (some interlanguage elements are the results of a ‘clear overgeneralisation’ of target language rules and semantic features).

From the above characteristics, it is evident that interlanguage is developed by learners of L2 who are not yet proficient in the target language but they are progressing towards L2 proficiency. Selinker came up with the term fossilisation as a stage in L2 acquisition. This term refers to a permanent cessation of progress towards the target language (TL). Since fossilisation is permanent, it means that despite all attempts at learning, proficiency does not improve. This is what speakers of an L2 retain from their L1. Interlanguage is one of the causes of errors in SLA. It is therefore important for teachers to be aware when the same errors appear regularly. In order to attain language proficiency learners need high levels of understanding. According to Owens (2001:143), language learning does not just happen; it needs certain cognitive, perceptual, social and communicative skills.

These high-level cognitive skills do not generally develop spontaneously; they need a medium of learning (language) to be understood.

EA analysis theorists have neglected the issue of cognition in relation to language learning. Katherine Nelson in Madiba (2001) supports the view that states that cognitive development is not separable from language. Piaget proposed a model of cognitive functioning that clearly places language on a cognitive base. Cognitive growth is thus responsible for language. The challenge is therefore for TUT to be able to enhance English language proficiency even if the cognitive abilities of students are below the required level. The English skills of students admitted to TUT should be at least at the Grade 12 level for easy transition.

Yule (2012:157) supports this view by saying language cannot be learned successfully if the cognitive abilities of the students are not developed.

Studies in EA show that unless students' intellectual abilities are able to cope in high-formal function contexts, errors and mother tongue interference will continue to be a problem in language contexts. SLA acquisition models do not only talk about language in isolation but also in relation to other important aspects of learning. The way language is acquired is influenced to a certain extent by three modes of development as suggested by Schleppegrell and O' Hallaron 2011). These authors suggest the following prism model (see figure 2.1 below) as a way of defining the development of learning a language, a view earlier submitted by Owens (2001) and Yule (2012).

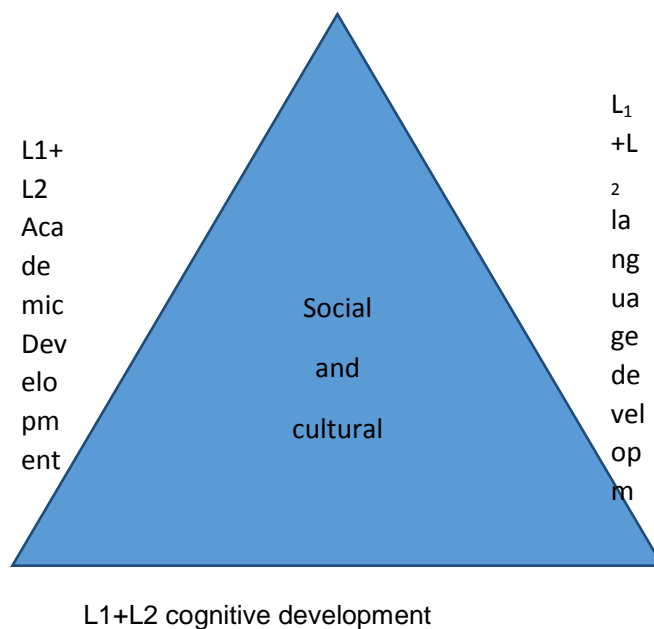


Diagram 2.1 Prism model of language acquisition

The prism model was proposed by Thomas and Collier (1997), as a model of language acquisition for learners. The model includes first and second language cognitive development, academic development, language development as well as social and cultural processes.

Cognitive development is a subconscious process that is developmental in nature. In this stage children acquire their first language unconsciously in a natural setting. Thought processes are built through interactions.

The critical factor as Cummins (2001) puts it is that cognitive development should take place in the first language so that a solid foundation is possible for transferring skills. Accordingly, academic knowledge, concepts and skills transfer from the L1 to the second language will later take place.

Research, has shown that it takes a language learner from five to seven years to reach academic proficiency in the second language. Language development on the other hand includes the innate ability the learners bring to the academic setting. All three stages that is, academic, language and cognitive development thrive if the social and cultural processes are effective.

It is therefore vital that to assure cognitive and academic success in a second language, a learner's first language system, both oral and written, is developed to a high cognitive level through the elementary school years. Cummins (2001:98) maintains that errors in language are best deducted with full attention being paid of written texts.

Different continents have different challenges in terms of mother tongue interference depending on the issues around native language use in relation to official language use.

2.5 Studies on error analysis and language interference and their implications for language teaching

The following linguists have conducted studies on error analysis and language interference and their implication for language teaching.

2.5.1 Asian context

Ho (2003) who is of Asian descent, affirms that language interference causes errors that make it difficult for learners to master the target language. The approach discussed in her findings offer means for empowering teachers to help students with problems in grammar. Her study was undertaken in Singapore with a focus on L2 grammar rules. The limitation of her study is the issue of looking at grammar in isolation. This is a problem because as Ellis (1994) puts it, the negative influence of errors on language teaching relates not only to grammar but also to a wide variety of issues such as vocabulary or lexical errors, syntactical errors, and phonological errors. However, in the context of this Asian study, the study of grammar is considered an important aspect of the learning of English.

Corder's (1972) emphasis on errors in language learning is not entirely disputed by scholars like Selinker (1992) and Carter (1997). Carter (1997) highlights the fact that grammar studies assist error analysis theory in the sense that "knowing the more about how grammar works is to understand more about how grammar is used and misused". Even in the South African context, errors which are not purely grammatical have been found to be a problem especially for the IT foundation students at TUT.

2.5.2 African context

According to Heugh (2000), (50%) of the worlds' children live in communities where the language of schooling is rarely, if ever, used at home.

In Africa, Manthata (1991), Nzama (2010), and Roos (1990) have conducted research studies on language interference and error analysis. Respected scholars in the African such as Ayo Bamgbose (2000) and Pai Obanya (1999) in Webb (2005) argue that if the theory of single medium teaching and learning continues in Africa, very few students will benefit from the vast resources that are ploughed into education. Countries like Botswana, Swaziland, and Malawi have concentrated on one single academic language which is the language of their former colonial masters. However, one of the populous nations in Africa, Nigeria, has deviated from this trend because it has always used the Yoruba language in the first six years of schooling. In addition, in 2003 neighbouring Mozambique abolished the Portuguese-only model to accommodate other languages in formal schooling.

The study by Nel and Muller (2010), which used qualitative research to assess learners' written work, identified the following types of errors from South African schools. These errors were identified in the writing of student teachers enrolled at a university in South Africa for an Advanced Certificate in education;

- Phonological and pronunciation errors
- Spelling errors
- Syntactic errors
- Over-generalisation
- Tenses
- Incorrect use of prepositions
- Confusion of gender

These areas are attributed to the language classroom where the MOI is English but the teachers are L2 speakers of English.

Chiwome and Tondlana (1992) in Nel and Muller (2010) state that non-English speaking students who have African languages as their L1 prefer to be taught in English at University, even though it takes longer to learn in an L2. African Englishes have a variety of deviations depending on the contextual background of the speakers.

Vale, Murray and Brown (2012:80) conclude that EA of students' writing in South Africa and Africa in general may be attributed to a lack of proficiency in English. Clements (1980) points out that it would be difficult to categorise the source of any one particular error as they closely interact or overlap.

Richards (1997) also regards language transfer as a source of error analysis. Parrot (1981:67) maintains that error occur when learners apply the rule of the L1 to the target language.

The findings in chapter 4 of this study show that some of the errors identified by Nel and Muller are also common in the written assignments of IT foundation students at TUT. Scholars have always maintained that EA studies in Africa are few; nevertheless, few inroads have been made in increasing research on the subject. Accordingly, the limited number of studies quoted in this research may not be adequate in contributing to this enquiry but they do nevertheless form the foundation on which this study was based and also contributed a number of guidelines to the study.

2.5.3 European context

The majority of the work on EA has been done by linguists of European descent. Studies by Brown (2007), Ellis (1997), Beardsmore (1997), Corder (1974) Selinker (1975) and Krashen (1992) have also ascertained that, in the European context, errors are a problem for learners who struggle with academic texts.

Some of the European countries might use English as an official language but English is not their L1. Larsen (1992) states that even if learners are first language speakers of English, errors are inevitable because, they emanate from the fact that the in which these errors are being made is academic English.

Early research on classroom language especially in America revealed that the majority of learners lack proficiency in academic language and that results in three negative outcomes;

1. There will be no active reading and writing activities.
2. Participation in classroom activities is reduced.
3. A lack of participation hinders academic achievement.

From the above outcomes, it would seem that lack of proficiency in the target language will affect the academic achievement of even these learners.

Errors in any context are a major problem in language proficiency.

2.5.4 Synthesised view of error analysis

It is evident that students whose primary language is not English are bound to deviate from Standard English. Language interference occurs because conversational talk and social language are not enough for academic success. Corder's view is that L2 transfer should not be treated solely as errors but also as mistakes which are corrected as time progresses. Errors in language require the attention of teachers and students alike. Ellis (1997) argues that all students, whether from Africa or Europe, have gaps in knowledge. He avers that errors reflect those gaps in knowledge and their occurrence is due to the fact that learners do not know what is correct. Mistakes, on the other hand, reflect occasional lapses in performance.

EA studies cannot be confined to Africa, but to the whole world where learning is taking place.

CHAPTER 3

3. Research method for investigating mother tongue interference and error analysis.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the description and explanation of the research method and the techniques used during data collection. It describes the design of the study, and the sampling techniques, explains how the data were collected and how they would be analysed. The data described in this study were collected by the researcher himself to ensure their reliability.

Joppe (2000) defines reliability as:

“...the extent to which result is consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under studies and if the results of the study cannot reproduce similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable”.

The concept of reliability is viewed differently by qualitative researchers in the sense that the question of replicability does not concern them. Qualitative researchers are mainly concerned with evaluating the findings of a qualitative research.

3.2 Research design

The method used in this study was qualitative. Patton (2001:39) defines qualitative research as a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in content-specific settings. In simpler terms, a qualitative approach allows researchers to embrace their involvement and role within the research.

While statistical evidence may be used in qualitative research, the paradigm of constructivism, which views knowledge as socially constructed, is central to this study because that knowledge may change depending on the circumstances. In this study, mother tongue interference and error analysis were studied and analysed but, whatever the results, they may change with time.

The research method applied was aligned with the biographical research methods and employed content analysis of students' assignments to evaluate the research question. One method that was used in this research study was that of autobiography. According to Busse et al (2000:30), autobiography is a collective qualitative research method for working on autobiographical text materials; for example, written episodes in which texts of different orders are generated. In terms of the text production, autobiographical research is of interest for researchers as a product of storytelling.

Busse et al (2000:45) further submit that the aim of autobiographical research methodology is not about writing a life story, but about the production of written summaries from which meaning can be deduced.

In autobiographical research, students are requested to write their life stories. These texts are then examined to ascertain whether language errors exist and any errors identified are then analysed. The point is that while a text is written about the life story, student texts are written to ascertain the level of proficiency of student writing in relation to the English language.

Data collected from students' assignments were analysed by looking at similarities and differences and the patterns in language errors (see Chapter 4 in this regard) in order to identify the errors and their impact on English language proficiency.

IT foundation students are students who are admitted to the extended curriculum of IT because they do not qualify for the first year of IT studies; hence, foundation students complete their studies in four years instead of three. The students in the IT foundation classes are predominantly African students who speak languages other than English. The Soshanguve campus of TUT is a previously disadvantaged institution in that resources and proper classroom are lacking and are overcrowded, in addition sports facilities are inadequate. Information and communication technology (ICT) has been identified as a key pillar of growth which entails the development and availability of skilled manpower.

The aim of the IT foundation course is to address the whole learner by enhancing cognitive, emotional and social skills. The course is characterised by three aspects apart from ICT-related skills; namely, Foundation Academic, Life and Language Skills (FPALS01); English skills; and Foundation Mathematics.

According to the 2013 study guide for FPALS01, students are supposed to attend 85% of the classes and the English Word Power programme. A number of research articles have been reviewed that favour a qualitative design when conducting research about human behaviour in the classroom. One of the core characteristics of this type of design is that it looks closely at human actions that are continuously recreating social life; such studies use words rather than numbers. This study aimed to establish the impact of the Sepedi/Setswana language on the English language proficiency of foundation students at the TUT Soshanguve Campus.

It is believed that qualitative methods are appropriate for this research because they give the respondents the ability to say what they feel. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002:122), qualitative research focuses on the meanings of people in historical cultural contexts. Comparisons between qualitative and quantitative methodologies show that qualitative methodologies are better suited to social research than to quantitative research. However, quantitative researchers maintain that qualitative research lacks adequate validity and reliability, because they view qualitative data as subjective and originating from a single context which makes it difficult to apply conventional standards of reliability and validity.

Zuber-Skerrit (1998:65) provides the most appropriate conceptualisation of both methods.

Table 3.1 gives a comparison of quantitative and qualitative research methods. This comparative analysis allows the researcher to present the data collecting methodology and to justify its use in this study.

Table 3.1: Comparison of quantitative and qualitative methodologies

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Goals	Study of general laws and trends	Study of individual characteristics
Target group	Large number of 'subjects'	A small group of participants
Criteria	Validity, reliability	Authenticity

Source: Zuber-Skerrit (1998:65)

3.3 Strengths of a qualitative design

According to Burns (2000:11), a qualitative design has the following strengths;

- It captures what people say and do.
- It is a product of how people interpret the complexity of their world.
- It helps the researcher to obtain an understanding of the participants' viewpoints.

- Qualitative research is based on the recognition of the importance of the subjective, experiential “life world” of human beings.

Guy, Edley, Arafat and Allen (1987:256) maintain that qualitative research is relevant to studies that seek to study human behaviour. They argue that qualitative research wants to know what kinds of things people are doing, what kinds of processes are at work, what kinds of meanings are constructed, what kinds of purposes and goals inform the participants’ acts, and what kinds of problems, constraints and contingencies they see in the world they occupy. A qualitative method is a research procedure that produces descriptive data, which are people’s own written or spoken words and observations.

On the other hand, May (2010:141) argues that the accounts people give of their actions are either “justifications” or “excuses”, which may be viewed as indicative of how people identify themselves.

Based on this information, it was decided that this study would be qualitative in nature.

3.4 Research into second language acquisition

Research in the human sciences, like all research in the social sciences, is affected by competing approaches – the traditional approach which draws the empirical-analytical methodologies and the non-traditional approach which is located in the interpretive tradition.

The methods that will be applied in this research study will be discussed in the following sections:

3.4.1 Biographical research

Roberts (2002:3) defines a biographical research method as a specific type of qualitative research which uses stories of individuals and other personal materials to understand the individual life within its social context. This kind of research requests the participant in research to write their life stories. In this case, however, the researcher used it to check participants' language proficiency and the way their mother tongue interferes in L2. The strategy for collecting data when using this type of method is text analysis (i.e. the examination of documents). Biographical research in the context of this study involved autobiographical writings.

3.4.2 Content analysis

In the social sciences, content analysis is a method for studying the content of communication. Babbie (2004:67) defines it as "the study of recorded human communications, such as books, laws, paintings, etc". According to McKay (2006:101), content analysis is considered a scholarly methodology in the humanities by means of texts which are studied and meaning is derived from them.

Stelmer (2001:12) defines content analysis as a systematic replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding. It often involves building and applying a fixed vocabulary of terms. Content analysis of texts often proceeds from a count of the number of times each word appears in the text (Lee 2000:107). On the other hand, Hsiu-Fang and Shannon (2005:1277–1288) submit that content analysis shows three distinct approaches: conventional, directed and summative analysis.

All three approaches were used to interpret meaning from the content of text data and, hence, adhere to a naturalistic paradigm. This study used summative analysis because the approach assisted the researcher in counting and comparing keywords or content as well as interpreting the underlying context. There was no statistical analysis in this study but a deduction was made by analyzing tests and coding information on errors according to selected criteria.

3.4.2.1 Advantages of content analysis

Content analysis was used in this study as a method of investigation because of the following advantages given by Krippendorf (1980) and Weber (1990);

- Content analysis looks directly at communication via texts or transcripts, and hence gets at the central aspect of social interaction.
- Can allow both quantitative and qualitative operations.

- Can provide valuable historical/cultural insights over time through the analysis of texts.
- Allows closeness to text which can alternate between specific categories and relationships and also statistically analyses the coded form of text.
- Can be used to interpret texts for purposes such as the development of expert system (since knowledge and rules can both be coded in terms of explicit statements about the relationships among concepts).
- Is an unobtrusive means of analysing interactions.
- It provides insight into complex models of human thought and language use.
- When done well, it is considered as a relatively “exact” research method (based on hard facts, as opposed to discourse analysis).

3.4.2.2 Disadvantages of content analysis

Despite the advantages of content analysis, Weber (1990:56) warns that it should be used carefully because of the following limitations;

- It can be time consuming
- Is subject to increased error, particularly when relational analysis is used to attain a higher level of interpretation.

- Is often devoid of theoretical base, or attempts to liberally draw meaningful inferences about the relationships and impacts implied in a study.
- Is inherently reductive, particularly when dealing with complex texts.
- It tends too often to simply consist of word counts
- It often disregards the context that produced the text, as well as the state of things after the text is produced.
- It can be difficult to automate or computerise.

3.4.3 Sampling techniques

3.4.3.1 The study population

Researchers are generally not able to study the whole population; hence, they usually draw a sample from the population using various sampling techniques (Babbie, 2004:107). The population sample used in this study was drawn from the IT foundation students at TUT registered for courses in language and life skills at the Soshanguve campus. A research population is defined by Strydom (2005:198), Somekh and Lewin (2005: 222) and Kalof, Dan, and Dietz (2008:42) as a set of individuals, units or elements in the universe which have characteristics on which researchers focus and to which the results of the analysis of data should be generalised.

Bless and Higson-Smith (2000), states that “sampling is a technical accounting device to rationalize the collection of information, to choose in an appropriate way the restricted set of objects, persons, events ... from which the actual information will be drawn”.

Sampling allows the researcher to feel confident about the representativeness of the sample chosen and such representativeness allows the researcher to make broader inferences (Gay, Mills & Airasian 2009:124).

According to (May 2010:93), a sample is a portion or a number of people who are selected or are a subset of a larger group called the population. Sample characteristics, according to May, should be the same as those of the population. Strydom 2005:195) defines a sample as a smaller number of individuals who are in some way representative of a population. There are many types of sample but all samples are either probability (often called random samples) or non-probability samples.

3.4.3.2 Sampling

It was not possible to use the assignments of all the IT foundation students in the chosen area of the study, and therefore the researcher selected respondents by using random sampling strategies.

3.4.3.2.1 Random (probability) sampling

According to Kalof et al (2008:42), random sampling is a technique by means of which samples are selected in some way suggested by randomisation and every member of a population is given an equal chance of being included in the sample.

Probability sampling produces a sample that will provide the researcher with the variation in the population and includes four different types of sample: simple random samples, systematic samples, stratified samples and cluster samples (Somekh & Lewin 2005:223).

Cluster sampling is a quick method for concentrating on a few classes in a school or university, for example. It follows the principle that when the population is large, the researcher initially selects sub-groups such as a class rather than randomly selecting from the whole population (Kalof et al 2008:223).

Gay et al (2009:129) define a cluster as a random selection of any location within which researchers can find an intact group of population members with similar characteristics, such as classrooms, schools, hospitals and department stores. Cluster samples usually involve less time and expense and are generally more convenient.

Gay et al (2009:130) outline the steps involved in cluster sampling as follows;

- Identify and define the population.
- Determine the desired sample size.

- Identify and define a logical cluster.
- List all clusters.
- Estimate the average number of population members per cluster.
- Determine the number of clusters needed by dividing the sample size by the estimated size of the cluster.
- Randomly select the required number of clusters, using a table of random numbers.
- In your study include all population members in each selected cluster.

In this study cluster sampling was used to select IT foundation students randomly according to their groups. I decided to use cluster sampling because it enabled selection from a number of groups. For example, in the case of this study there are five groups doing the same course (Language and Life Skills). Accordingly, only two groups were selected from the whole population of six classes – this is known as cluster sampling.

The IT foundation students comprise 240 students divided into five groups. One lecturer teaches an average of 50 students in each group. Using cluster sampling only two groups were selected to represent the whole population.

Assignment scripts for both male and female respondents between the ages of 18 and 23 were analysed.

In order to do this, students were given an assignment on the same topic: that is, writing their own biography. The scripts were then marked by the researcher and a colleague and the researcher checked for common L1 interference and errors and how they affected English language proficiency.

The students used in the study are black and are not first language speakers of English. English communication is taught during the language and life skills period, and students attend at least four classes a week of two periods each (i.e. 12 hours a week per group because a period is 1 hour 30 minutes in duration). The Monday period is used mainly for the English word power programme, which is the computerised English improving improvement assessment. The assignments were given to students during 2012 and the information and data analysis applied to the IT foundation students only.

This study used random sampling since members of the population had the same chance of being chosen for the sample and the elements could be calculated for each member of the population. In simple terms, a random sampling procedure provides an equal opportunity of selection for each element in a population. Because of probability and chance, the sample should contain subjects with characteristics similar to the population as a whole. It should be noted that only Sepedi/Setswana students were selected for the study. While this study was about Sepedi, Setswana students were included in the sample because according to UNESCO report of 2006 Sepedi and Setswana have similar sentence structure.

Sepedi (also known as Sesotho sa Leboa), is very closely related to two other South African languages (Sesotho and Setswana) and they seem to use the same sentence structure and have the same lexical items. Sesotho, which is mainly spoken in the Free State province and Lesotho, was not included in the Sotho group because I had only two students in the class in 2012 and that would not have made much difference in the analysis of data and their results.

The other ethnic groups that were included in the population but that did not form part of the study were Zulu, Tsonga and Venda speakers who made up to less than 5% of the total population combined. It was therefore appropriate to use only Sepedi/Setswana students for this research.

3.4.3.2.2 Sample size

One of the most important issues in sampling is to determine the most suitable size of the sample. A large sample is more representative but is very costly. Balnaves and Caputi (2001) argue that a large sample is no guarantee of accuracy; however, a small sample on the other hand is much less accurate but is more convenient. Bless and Higson-Smith (2000) maintain that “a major criterion to use when deciding on sample size is the extent to which the sample is representative on the population”.

Accordingly, the absolute size of the sample is the crucial factor rather than the relative size or the proportion of the population sampled.

The larger the sample size the smaller the error will be in estimating the characteristics of the population; however, it will cost more to administer a survey and analyse the data (Somekh & Lewin 2005:223).

The question raised by qualitative researchers has always been: “How many participants are enough?” Gay et al (2009:136) state that it depends on what the study wants to achieve but there are no hard and fast rules.

The Faculty of Computer Studies is one of the main faculties at the TUT Soshanguve campus and it offers a range of national diplomas and postgraduate programmes. The faculty was initially situated at all three TUT campuses, but after the merger of the three, former racially divided institutions, (Technikon North-West (TNW), Pretoria Technikon (Preteck), and Technikon Northern Gauteng (TNG), the faculty was officially moved to the Soshanguve campus. All students regardless, of race, have to apply for admission to the Soshanguve campus if they are interested in studying IT.

The TUT Soshanguve campus is located north of Pretoria. Of historical significance is the fact that the township catered for people from the Sotho, Shangaan (Tsonga), Nguni and Venda sections of the South African population, as classified by the apartheid regime led by the National Party. Ironically, Block L, where the Soshanguve campus of TUT is located, was initially designated as an area for Sepedi speakers. This study seeks to evaluate the interference of the Sepedi language in English language proficiency.

The TUT Soshanguve campus is not well resourced like the Pretoria campus, which is seen by many as the main campus of the three merged institutions. After 2004, the TUT Pretoria campus became the administrative and financial control spot of the merged institutions. One of the challenges that TUT is still faced with is the unequal distribution of resources among the campuses. Even before the merger, the Soshanguve campus had problems such as overcrowded classrooms and in some cases problems with the financial stability of its students since it caters for students from the former Department of Education and Training.

CHAPTER 4

4. Data presentation and the discussion of findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data collected from learners in the 2012 IT foundation group at the Soshanguve South campus of TUT. The researcher marked the assignment as the first examiner and the second assessor was a colleague in the department of languages who is qualified to teach English as a second language in the IT foundation course.

The following grammatical and spelling errors are presented and discussed: tenses, prepositions, punctuation and spelling errors.

The chapter discusses language interference and errors based on the following criteria:

- error type
- error frequency
- how to correct the errors

The data were analysed and learners' common English language mistakes were highlighted: the mistakes were then converted into percentages to clarify the number of errors identified.

4.2 Learners' assignment

Learners were requested to write an assignment on the given topic with the aim of identifying and diagnosing any language errors. The researcher decided to use the IT foundation course because the research would help the IT department to develop English programmes that will assist language specialists to design appropriate corrective curricula.

Ninety-eight learners wrote the assignment on the given topic and they were asked to indicate the following; their mother tongue, race, gender, and age. This biographical information provided the researcher with a clear picture of the demographic spectrum. It would not be appropriate to do research without knowing the subjects closely as knowledge of the research participants renders the researcher's analysis more appropriate (Gay et al 2009:122).

- Purposive sampling was used to select Sepedi/Setswana students for the two groups. Groups were labeled A to E. However, only two groups were selected for the sake of this study. The study used purposive sampling to identify two IT foundation groups at the TUT Soshanguve campus where there is a high proportion of learners who grew up in non-English speaking environments.

4.2.1 Number of respondents from groups A and E

Table 4.1 Number of respondents per group

Group name	Number of participants	Percentage
A	48	49
E	50	51
Total	98	100

As displayed in table 4.1, 48 (49%) respondents were from group A while 50 (51%) were from group E, giving a total of 98 participants. These were the participants who took part in the investigation and submitted their research assignments. The two groups were selected because they had indicated their willingness to participate by signing the consent form. Furthermore, they were easily accessible and the researcher was able to manage them with ease. These foundation groups are the ones used as a pilot to prepare students for IT foundation 1. From 2012 to 2014, the university has seen major growth in the application and admission of foundation students who ultimately gain access to mainstream IT courses.

4.2.2 Mother tongue of the respondents

Table 4.2 Mother tongue of the respondents

Mother tongue	Group A	Group E	Total	Percentage
Sepedi	21	32	53	54,1
Setswana	07	06	13	13,2
isiZulu	10	05	15	15,3
Tsonga	03	08	11	11,2
Venda	02	01	03	03
Sesotho	02	0	02	02
Afrikaans	0	01	01	01
Total	45	53	98	100

A total of 53 (54, 1%) out of the 98 respondents speak Sepedi as their mother tongue, 13 (13, 2%) speak Setswana, 15 (15, 3%) are isiZulu speakers, 11 (11, 2%) speak Tsonga, three (3%) speak Venda, two (2%) speak Sesotho (mainly spoken in the Free State Province) and one (1%) Afrikaans. This group is basically homogeneous since the majority of the respondents speak other languages other than English.

Black South African learners at the Soshanguve campus were identified as participants for the study since they are in the majority in the IT foundation course and they were available to participate in the study in 2012.

4.2.3 Race of the respondents who participated in the investigation

Table 4.3 Race of the respondents

Race	Group A	Group E	Total	Percentage
Black	45	52	97	99
Coloureds	0	01	01	01
Total	45	53	98	100

According to the data taken from learners' assignments, 97 (99%) of the total respondents are black South Africans and just one (1%) is from the coloured community.

This scenario is not unusual at the TUT Soshanguve campus because the campus generally admits students from the black communities in different provinces and the campus is located in a semi-urban township north of Pretoria. Even after its merger with Technikon Pretoria and North-West Technikon, the population demographics have not changed. The majority of white students still prefer to study at the Pretoria campus of TUT while the majority of black students apply to both the Garankuwa and Soshanguve campuses.

According to the orientation feedback, the one Afrikaans student who registered at the Soshanguve campus is of coloured origin, and he registered because he wanted to study a course in the IT faculty.

The faculty of Information Technology was relocated to the Soshanguve campus after the merger and the two other campuses (Pretoria and Garankuwa) do not offer any courses in IT. It is clear then that the majority of students at the Soshanguve campus will remain black because of the location of the campus and the historical context of the South African demographic distribution.

The recent 2011 census bears witness to the fact that racial choice when it comes to place of residence or study is still based on the stereotypes created by segregation along racial lines. One of the continuous challenges is the view that the former disadvantaged institutions are still under-resourced and violence and unnecessary strikes are often a direct result.

4.2.4 Gender of the respondents who participated in the investigation

4.4 Gender of the participants

Gender	Group A	Group E	Total	Percentage
Male	33	45	78	80
Female	12	08	20	20
Total	45	53	98	100

Table 4.4 shows that, in 2012, the IT foundation groups A and E at the Soshanguve campus consisted of 78 (80%) of male students and 20 (20%) female. For the past century language and gender have been debatable issues when it comes to SLA in relation to gender, however, it is not an issue in this study. The study merely aimed to analyse errors by L2 speakers of English.

4.2.5 Age of the respondents who participated in the investigation

4.5 Age of the respondents

Age range	Group A	Group E	Total	Percentage
15-18	0	0	0	0
19-23	45	53	98	100
Total	45	53	98	100

The age range of the participants in both groups A and E is 19 to 23 years, with all 98 (100%) participants falling within this age range. This age has generally been shown to be the right age for students entering university.

According to Chambers and Trudgill (1980:201), learners who commence learning an L2 after the age of 15 are less likely to develop as much grammatical ability as those who began before. This explanation is not convincing because it does not explain why adolescent learners progress more rapidly than younger learners. In the presentation of data, the following key is essential for understanding the abbreviations used in the discussion that follows,

4.3 Learner errors identified from the assignments

The following are examples of errors identified from the assignments/essays presented by the learners sampled in the IT foundation courses at the Soshanguve campus.

Key:

Tenses	WTF	=	Wrong tense form
Spelling	SP/E	=	Spelling Error
Prepositions	WP	=	Wrong preposition
Verb form	WVF	=	Wrong verb form
Pronouns	P	=	Wrong use of pronouns

Learner errors in this study were classified according to the type of errors and how they can be corrected.

4.3.1 Pronoun errors

The following errors were seen in the majority of the essays of the IT foundation learners;

- a. The people **they** come.
- b. I attended school in a small town of Bela-Bela where I started my Grade 9 **there**.
- c. My brother's dog **it** runs fast.
- d. **They** were many students on the registration queues.
- e. **They** are many lions in our Zoo

The correct forms of sentences are as follows;

- a. The people come.
- b. I attended school in the small town of Bela-Bela where I started Grade 9.
- c. My brother's dog runs fast.
- d. There were many students in the registration queues.
- e. There are many lions in our zoo.

The above information shows that there is a serious problem with the use of nouns in relation to pronouns. In the majority of these essays, learners seemed to use pronouns and nouns simultaneously. In English, pronouns are used in the place of the noun. This error could be as a result of the Sepedi/Setswana sentence structure. In Sepedi for example, it is correct to say “Batho ba a tla”. This may be literally translated in English to “The people they come”. In Sepedi/Setswana, the English version of the sentence is correct. This problem with second language speakers of English arises because they will try to force their L1 rules onto the L2.

Longress (1990:221) was the first person to attribute pronoun errors to the first language interference that results from the direct transfer of L1 word order to SLA. This is what was referred to earlier as interlingual interference. The first type of errors identified in the assignments occurs when learners of a second language carry over the habits of their mother tongue into the second language. In the last two sentences shown above, especially the preposition errors, wrong insertion of prepositions are a problem. The use of the pronoun “they” is incorrect because it is a pronoun used as a subject of the verb rather than a pronoun used to introduce a sentence.

4.3.2 Incorrect use of tenses

- a. In 2001, my parents **do** well by taking us to Durban.
- b. When I first came to TUT I used to **worried**.
- c. My life **begun** when God created me.
- d. I **am** born in Jane Furse, Limpopo province.
- e. As time went on I **forgive** him.

The correct forms of the tense will be as follows;

- a. In 2001, my parents **did** well by taking us to Durban.
- b. When I first came to TUT I used to **worry**.
- c. My life **began** when God created me.
- d. I **was** born in Jane Furse, Limpopo province.
- e. As time went on I **forgave** him.

Learners exhibit problems in using the correct tense with the infinitive and the correct tense form on the verb. The majority of students wrote incorrect tenses if the irregular verbs were involved in a sentence such as the “When I first came to TUT I used to worried” instead of worry. Learners would seem to experience problems with non-action verbs especially with words like “am” instead of “was”. In addition, learners confuse regular verbs and irregular verbs.

The majority of students do not seem to understand the difference between the past tense and the past participle. In other instances tense errors happen because the present tense form is used instead of the past tense. One would assume that learners would be aware of the fact that the past tense of “sit” is “sat”.

4.3.3 Spelling errors

Of the assignments assessed, 98% of the learners still made spelling mistakes which meant that the sentences lost meaning.

The following are some of the spelling mistakes that were identified;

Recurrent wrong spelling

Correct spelling

grandmoter

grandmother

stoke

stock

allot

a lot

scool

school

listing

listening

The issue of spelling errors has been overlooked by many linguists because they are regarded as insignificant in language proficiency. Nevertheless, spelling is important in language proficiency because wrong spelling will result in sentences not being understood. In the above examples, for instance, learners write “scool” instead as “school”. This is sometimes used as an example of what is commonly referred to as cellphone language. The advent of cellphone language has seen many English language violations in terms of spelling. One example is the use of “I want to see U”, instead of “I want to see you”. The word “U” is an Afrikaans form “jy” [you] to show respect if one is talking to somebody older or senior. However, it is also sometimes used in exchanging messages via cellphones. This kind of language is not formal language and it affects the proficiency levels of learners.

Spelling errors often result in readers misreading the core message of written texts.

4.3.4 Prepositional errors

- a. My parents bought a house **at** the city.
- b. I went **+** high school in another village called Kopela.
- c. I am majoring **with** mathematics and computer engineering.
- d. We have done a lot of work **to** the community.
- e. I was born **in** Letaba Hospital in Limpopo.

The correct prepositions in the above sentences are as follows;

- a. My parents bought a house **in** the city.
- b. I went **to** the high school in another village called Kopela.
- c. I am majoring **in** mathematics and computer engineering.
- d. We have done a lot of work **for** the community.
- e. I was born **at** Letaba Hospital in Limpopo.

From the learner assignments, it could be seen that the majority of learners either omitted inserting the prepositions or they inserted a wrong preposition. In the case of sentence “b”, learners did not insert any preposition and that caused the sentence to sound and be structurally incorrect.

In Sepedi for example, there are certain sentences with no prepositions. The following sentence, “My parents bought a house in the city”, differs from Sepedi because written directly, the sentence would take this form: “My parents bought a house the city”. In the incorrect sentence, which is correct in Sepedi, no preposition would be used. L1 sentence structure rules are thus transferred to the L2.

English prepositions are difficult for any English second language (ESL) learner because they usually relate preposition to their mother tongue. The selection of incorrect preposition in English may affect the entire meaning of the idea intended by the learner.

4.3.5 Incorrect verb forms

One of the problematic issues in L2 transference is incorrect verb forms from the L1.

The following are examples of incorrect verb form errors taken from the essays;

- a. Accommodation was paid by my sponsor and it **costed** a lot of money.
- b. My grandparents **done** everything in their power to see us happy.
- c. I was **suppose to** go to the library.
- d. The teacher saw that I **had wrote** a good assignment.
- e. We **have plan** to visit TUT career week.

In the following sentences the correct verb forms are used;

- a. Accommodation was paid by my sponsor and it **cost** a lot of money.
- b. My grandparents **have done** everything in their power to see us happy.
- c. I was **supposed to** go to the library.
- d. The teacher saw that I **had written** a good assignment
- e. We **have planned** to visit TUT career week.

This type of error occurs because of the ignorance of learners as regards the correct verb forms in English. In this category learners make mistakes with the tense of the verb that follows the infinitive. Richards (1974:38), submits that learners sometimes apply a rule in areas where it is incorrect and contextually inappropriate.

Verbs sometimes take the present tense and the past tense depending on the tense of the sentence and then there are certain verb forms which will remain the same whether the sentence is in the present tense or the past tense. These kinds of verbs are called irregular verbs and include words like, cost, bet and put. Hence, the past tense and the past participle of “put” is just “put”.

Lastly, learners are often unsure about the form of words in the past tenses in the L2. Sometimes the rules are applied generally in the sense that learners think that if the rule for the past tense, states that -ed should be added to the word, they should add –ed at the end of every word. In the case of “cost” for example, learners add –ed and the word appear as costed. In the context of the payment for accommodation in the sentence above it is wrong because the context is not about the cost of that accommodation but rather about the amount which was paid to defray expenses.

4.4 Summary

This chapter has attempted to highlight the various types of error as they were identified in various learner essays. It is the opinion of this study that these errors affect the English language proficiency of learners in the IT foundation course at TUT.

The next chapter will analyse the data presented in this chapter and evaluate whether the data collected assisted in attaining the objectives of the study.

CHAPTER 5

5. Conclusion, suggestions and recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The main aim of this study was to investigate the nature and extent of mother tongue interference by the Sepedi/Setswana languages in the English language proficiency of IT foundation learners at TUT. For the study to achieve its objective, a literature review was undertaken on error analysis and mother tongue interference of the first language in a second language. An assignment (an essay) was used as a tool for collecting data from IT foundation learners at the TUT Soshanguve South campus.

The researcher's concern was to investigate the persistent problem of mother tongue interference and language deviations (errors) even when programmes such as English Word Power are used as intervention strategies by the university. Language errors identified from the students' work covered language areas such as preposition use, verb usage, spelling, pronouns and tenses. In this study these were the five areas on which the research concentrated. The data obtained from the learner essays were qualitatively analysed and interpretations of the data were provided. Although no statistical analysis was conducted, reasons for why these errors occur were given.

The preceding chapter attempted to present all the errors in a systematic way and to clarify why those errors were identified in relation to the mother tongue. The following sections outline the findings of the study.

Chapter 1 identified the need for this type of study, which was prompted by the awareness of persistent errors in learners' written work. Mother tongue interference as a problem accordingly prompted the need for the study.

Chapter 2 dealt with findings of other researchers, including Corder (1975), Erdoğan (2005), Şanal (2008), Ellis (1997), Nzama (2010) and Richards (1974) to name but a few. This chapter showed that mother tongue interference and language errors are a product of language learning. Other scholars contend that error analysis should not be regarded as a problem but rather as an awareness of the learning process. Various types of English language proficiency were dealt with and the meaning of fluency as given by different linguists was examined.

Chapter 3 dealt with the research methodology used to investigate the causes of errors in English at a university of technology. The study used cluster sampling to identify 98 students in the IT foundation course at TUT. Accordingly, two classes of the five classes were included in the sample. These classes are referred to in the study as groups A and E. cluster sampling enabled researchers to concentrate on just a few classes at a university.

Chapter 4 dealt with the data obtained in the study. These data were interpreted and discussed mainly in terms of the possible reasons why learners commit such errors.

5.2 Summary of the findings

The findings in this study can be summarised as follows;

- When learning a second language, the learner's mother tongue or first language interferes with learning.
- The majority of learner errors in the L2 emanate from the overgeneralization of L1 grammar rules.
- In cases where learners cannot master the rules of L2 they may develop an interlanguage.
- Often the very people who teach the L2 are themselves not first language speakers of English and hence do not have the fluency of a first language speaker.
- In Sepedi/ Setswana speakers, prepositional and tense errors are caused by the L1, since these elements do not occur in certain sentences in those languages.
- The findings show that for errors to be corrected effectively, learners should develop a culture of reading.

5.3 Significance of the study

The study contributes to the pedagogy of universities of technology in South Africa.

For many years, universities of technology did not have language departments in their academic departments. Indeed, language departments are mainly regarded as contributing to academic development and having no credit-bearing courses. This means that learners do not take languages in general or English in particular as a language to be learned, but rather as a means for passing their content courses.

5.4 Limitations of the study

The study was undertaken at a university of technology in a semi-urban area and therefore it cannot claim to be comprehensive or extensive in addressing learner errors. The study can however, be generalised to other universities of technology in South Africa where language departments serve as academic development centres. In TUT, unlike traditional universities, there is no English major course and most language courses are studied as applied language studies.

In answer to the question of whether the sample is fully representative of the population, one may assume that this is so because the respondents were taken from the cohort of learners that did not qualify to be admitted for the first year of study. Some researchers may criticise this study for its focus on foundation students but this can be justified by stating that the foundation is the focus of the academic development programme.

The essays allowed the students to write what they thought and in that sense they produced different kinds of errors.

The researcher was not the sole judge of these errors because a colleague with an M.A. (TESOL) degree was used as the external assessor after the researcher had assessed the students. This to a certain extent will allay fears about validation process.

5.5 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made pertaining to the teaching of English in a foundation course such as that of the IT departments at TUT:

- Lecturers should use English exclusively in language classes and should at all cost avoid code switching.
- All lecturers who are involved in teaching English should upgrade their qualifications in English.
- The language of teaching and learning should be English. Regardless of the content.
- Learners should be encouraged to read extensively especially magazines and newspapers written in English.
- Language feedback sessions should be held regularly
- Lecturers who are involved in teaching English should design appropriate English teaching materials.

- English improvement programmes such as English Word Power should be compulsory for all foundation students for academic development intervention purposes.
- The university should develop an English course for all registered students.
- A credit-bearing compulsory English course should be a prerequisite for all first-year students.

5.6 Conclusion

According to Corder (1975), errors in language learning should not be viewed negatively but rather as a conscious improvement in learning language. Errors are regarded by other linguists as a sign of language impediment, but Selinker's view is that they are a necessary part of learning a language.

Lightbown and Spada (2006:153) concede that learner errors are a tool with which teachers can give appropriate corrective feedback to learners.

Finally, language research is empirical in nature. There are therefore no definite findings that can be generalised to other institutions because this research has only studied two languages. This study will however serve as a basis for further research on error analysis at any university of technology.

The learners' language gave evidence of mother tongue interference and language errors and this is inevitable in a setting where English is not the first language of the majority of speakers.

Accordingly, it is evident that foundation students make many language errors because they are not fluent in English and because English is not their mother tongue.

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Appendix 1



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Kantoor van die Dekaan

Department of Afrikaans

Consent Form

Project Title

The nature and extent of mother tongue interference by Sepedi on the effectiveness of learning English among Information Technology foundation students at Tshwane University of Technology

Researcher's Details

Mr Sethole S.P. (M.A. Applied language studies, University of Pretoria, Department of Afrikaans

Supervisor's Details

Dr Suzan Thembekwayo, Department of Afrikaans, University of Pretoria

Dear Sir/Madam

I, the undersigned, am engaged in research on "The nature and extent of mother tongue interference by Sepedi on the effective learning of English among Information Technology foundation students at Tshwane University of Technology".

One of the tasks I need to undertake is to do document analysis (i.e. analysis of students' autobiographical essays).

The purpose of this letter is to ask for your consent to use your autobiographical essays for content analysis. If you agree, would you please indicate your willingness by signing the note of consent on the last page of this letter?

What is the study all about?

The study seeks to investigate how mother tongue interference of Sepedi influences the effective learning of English among information technology foundation students at Tshwane University of Technology (TUT). My teaching of foundation students in the faculty of information Technology (IT) especially language and life skills course made me aware that most students use mother tongue instead of English in class in certain instances in their assignments and tests. The objective of the study is to see how this problem can be addressed with the assistance of programmes like English word power (EWP).

Tasks in participation

66 (67%) of the assignments (Essays) out of the total of 98 will be chosen through purposive sampling. Sepedi and Setswana speaking students' essays will be used given the similar structure of both languages. The Sepedi and Setswana students will be identified because the essays require students to indicate their home languages on the cover of the assignment. The essay is written for *ad hoc* research purposes only. This is how the targeted students will be isolated from the other students speaking different languages.

Anonymity guarantee

The participants are not required to indicate their names on the assignments (Essays). The assignments (Essays) are therefore submitted anonymously. These Essays will be written for *ad hoc* research purposes only and their limited use for that purpose is guaranteed.

Risks and benefits of participating in the study

You are free not to participate in the study by not submitting your autobiographical essay. Non-participation will have no negative academic consequence whatsoever. The participants are free to withdraw from the study without any penalty/and/or future disadvantage. The autobiographical essays and the analysis thereof will be kept private and the findings and the essays will be stored securely and only researchers and TUT research ethics committee led by Dr WA Hoffman will have access to the records.

As an incentive to students, the use and analysis of your autobiographical essay will make a contribution towards the establishment of appropriate intervention strategies for encouraging English language proficiency at TUT.

There are no specific financial or material benefits in allowing the use of your essay.

Contact for additional information

Researcher: can be contacted during office hours at Tel (012) 382 9599, or his cellular phone at 0720702660. Supervisor: can be contacted during office hours at Tel (012) 420 4075 or on her cellular phone 0822643960. Should you have any questions regarding ethical aspects of the study, you can contact the chairperson of the TUT research ethics committee, Dr WA Hoffman, during office hours at Tel (012) 382 6265/46, e mail Hoffmanwa@tut.ac.za.

Declaration

Having read through the contents of this consent documents and understood their implication, I _____ (Please Print) hereby declare that I allow the researcher to use my assignment for the purpose of this study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's name: _____ (Please print)

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 2

The assignment (Autobiography)

Write an autobiographical article that defines your life story from birth until now.

Requirements for the assignment;

1. The assignment should be two pages long (Typed).
2. On the title page please indicate the following;
 5. Age
 6. Gender
 7. Race
 8. Home language
3. The assignment should be coherent and carefully structured.

Language specific requirements

1. The assignment should be written in the appropriate tense.
2. The use of prepositions, verb forms, pronouns/nouns, tense and spelling will be evaluated.
3. Please re-read your assignment before submission in order to eliminate glaring mistakes in spelling and grammar.

Total Marks: 100