

Errors in the Written English of Learners in Selected Phuthaditjhaba Secondary Schools

Moroke Zacharia Sematle

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ABSTRACT

Errors in the Written English of Learners in Selected Phuthaditjhaba Secondary Schools.

Moroke Zacharia Sematle

This study examined errors in the written English of black learners in secondary schools in Phuthaditjhaba. This is a descriptive-analytical cross-sectional study to find out the categories of errors made by Phuthaditjhaba grade 11 learners and the possible causes of such errors. A random stratified sample of three schools, one from the top stratum, one from the middle stratum and one from the bottom stratum, was selected based on the merit list of the overall Provincial Examination Results of the Phuthaditjhaba District for the academic year 1998. Samples of written language were elicited from 108 learners by means of a written composition task. Thirty compositions, ten from each school, were randomly selected for analysis. The thirty compositions were not of equal length; to control for this only the first 200 words of each composition were analyzed for errors. The results revealed that the learners made errors falling into two major categories: grammatical and lexical. Grammatical errors were categorized into verbs, articles, prepositions, singular-plural noun forms and pronouns. Lexical errors were categorized into spelling and semantic errors. An analysis of the errors suggested that they were influenced by the normal development of the target language (intralingual/developmental errors) and by the mother tongue of the learners (interference).

DEDICATION

For the success and prosperity of all Bafokeng ba ha Nkejane, Moojane, Letsshela Ratselanyane.

I fully dedicate this thesis, with my love and more thanks than I can express, to my son, Moojane Hlopheho Sematle, whose birth ushered in inspiration and encouragement to complete this work.

I also dedicate this thesis to the memory of my grandfather, Hlopheho Sematle, whose untimely death deprived me of valuable informal education that I could have gained from him, but at the same time weaned me and helped me to develop towards self-dependence.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my grandmother, Matieho Sematle, who survived all these years, from around 1908, to see me climb the proverbial ladder of academic success.

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Chapter One

Presentation of the Problem

1.1 Background to the Study

1.1.4 Broad Groupings of Languages in South Africa

South Africa is a multicultural country with a variety of languages. The languages most commonly spoken by blacks can be put into certain cognate language groupings, e.g. Sesotho, Sepedi and Setswana are closely related Sotho languages, and isiZulu, isiNdebele and isiXhosa are closely related Nguni languages. This fact makes it easier for black learners to learn other black languages in the same group, provided they are sufficiently exposed to them.

English and Afrikaans, spoken as first languages mainly by white South Africans, are both Germanic languages of the Indo-European group (*Encarta World Dictionary*, 1999). While they are closely related to each other in their syntax: e.g. "*A man drinks beer*" [English] and "*'n Man drink bier*" [Afrikaans], they are not at all related to the ancestral languages of black South Africans. This African-Germanic linguistic divide, which tends to follow racial lines, is the source of a number of problems when it comes to South African education.

In black schools, English and Afrikaans are referred to as second languages. In practical terms, either may be a fourth, fifth, sixth or even a seventh language that is learnt by the black learner. For example, a child may grow up, during his/her *sensitive period*--a period during which language acquisition is most efficient-- (Lamendella, as cited in Larsen-

Freeman & Long, 1991), in an environment where Sesotho is the only spoken language. Later, after the *critical period*--a period after which complete mastery of a new language is alleged to be more difficult--(Lennenberg, as cited in Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Brumfit, 1984; Klein, 1986; Hoff-Ginsberg, 1997), this child may come into contact with isiZulu speakers and learn isiZulu, and thereafter learn siSwati in the same way. In a case like this, Sesotho is, to this learner, his or her first language (L1), isiZulu the second language (L2) and siSwati the third language (L3). Obviously, English and Afrikaans will come as L4 and L5 languages to be learnt. However, in the context of this study any language that is learned after the L1 is regarded as an L2.

1.1.2 *Types of Multilingualism*

The linguistic situation in South Africa is largely multilingual in nature because more than one language is used for everyday purposes. Romaine (1989) identifies six forms of bilingual acquisition, namely: (1) one person-one language: "The parents have different native languages with each having some degree of competence in the other's language. The language of one of the parents is the dominant language of the community. The parents each speak their own language to the child from birth" (pp. 166-167). (2) non-dominant home language: "The parents have different native languages. The language of one of the parents is the dominant language of the community. Both parents speak the non-dominant language to the child, who is fully exposed to the dominant language only when outside the home, and in particular in nursery school" (p. 167). (3) non-dominant home language without community support: "The parents share the same native language. The dominant language

is not that of the parents. The parents speak their own language to the child” (p. 167). (4) double non-dominant home language without community support: “The parents have different native languages. The dominant language is different from either of the parents’ languages. The parents each speak their own language to the child from birth” (p. 167). (5) non-native parents: “The parents share the same native language. The dominant language is the same as that of the parents. One of the parents always addresses the child in a language which is not his/her native language” (p. 168), [e.g. a Sesotho-speaking couple in the Phuthaditjhaba region, where one parent speaks to the child in English]. (6) mixed languages: “The parents are bilingual. Sectors of the community may also be bilingual. Parents code-switch and mix languages” (p. 168). There are South Africans who are multilingual within one language group such as those who speak Sesotho, Setswana and Sepedi. There also those who are multilingual across language groups, such as those who speak Sesotho, isiZulu and English. Finally there are also those who are multilingual within and across language groups such as those who speak Sesotho, Setswana, isiZulu, isiXhosa, English and Afrikaans.

Mother-tongue speakers of black languages experience a different form of bilingualism from mother tongue-speakers of English and Afrikaans. Lemmer (1995) distinguishes between additive and subtractive bilingualism in the South African context. *Additive bilingualism* occurs in a situation “where children from a dominant language group add a second language to their existing repertory of language skills at no cost to the development and maintenance of their mother tongue” (Skutnabb-Kangas, as cited in Lemmer, 1995, p. 87). It would appear that additive bilingualism is a positive experience for a learner (Malherbe, as cited in Lemmer, 1995, p. 87). In the South African situation this is more often

the case with Afrikaans- and English-speaking learners. There are Afrikaans-medium schools for Afrikaans L1 learners, where Afrikaans is used as a medium of instruction for all subjects. In such schools, English is taught as an L2. Thus, the mother tongue of the learners, Afrikaans, is reinforced at school, and English is an additional language (Lemmer, 1995). There are also English-medium schools, for English L1 learners, in which English is the medium of instruction for all subjects, and Afrikaans is taught as a compulsory L2. Again, in this situation, the mother tongue of learners is reinforced at school, and Afrikaans is an additional language for learners (Lemmer, 1995).

The situation is completely different for mother-tongue speakers of black languages in South Africa. In most schools, instruction in all subjects is given in the L1 for the first four years, and Afrikaans and English are also taught as second languages. Thereafter, there is a transfer to an L2 medium, usually English (Lemmer, 1995). This places learners at the risk of “not being given sufficient opportunity to acquire mother-tongue language skills” (Skutnabb-Kangas, as cited in Lemmer, 1995, p. 89) before an L2 is taught. The school situation seems not to support mother-tongue learning. There is apparently no attention given to the maintenance of their L1. Such learners may not therefore develop proficiency in both the mother tongue and the second language, which is what Skutnabb-Kangas (as cited in Lemmer, 1995) called *subtractive bilingualism*. Lightbown and Spada (1999) argue that the major cause of concern about subtractive bilingualism is that, in some situations, completely immersing children in the target language may virtually cut them off from their L1 and make them lose their L1 before they have developed an “age-appropriate” mastery of the L2.

1.1.3 Government Policy on the Language of Education

Language diversity in South Africa poses several problems in education and will continue to do so. Before the 1994 democratic elections, the solution proposed by the government in power was the implementation of a form of bilingualism that provided for English and Afrikaans L1 speakers to the exclusion of native speakers of other languages (Lemmer, 1995). Afrikaans became the medium of instruction in schools for Afrikaans L1 learners, and English the medium for English L1 learners. English as a second language (ESL) served after grade 4 as a vehicular medium of instruction and learning for many subjects, except other language subjects, in the education of black learners in South Africa. This use of the English language has been increasing ever since 1994, and pressure is increasing from parents to use ESL to teach various subjects earlier than grade 4, with the result that the first language is not developed.

According to Lemmer (1995), since 1991 the choice of the medium of instruction has been left in the hands of the parent body at each school. There were three options available (National Education Coordinating Committee, as cited in Lemmer). These options were:

- “straight for” the long-term medium of instruction (that is from the first year of schooling), which could be English, Afrikaans or an African language.
- a sudden transfer from the mother tongue to a second-language medium after the fourth year of schooling.
- a gradual transfer from the mother tongue to a second-language medium during the first four years of schooling. (p. 85)

It would appear that the black community has increasingly chosen either option one (private schools) or two (public schools), and the medium of instruction in most black secondary schools has become English.

While in the past only English and Afrikaans were official languages, since the 1994 elections South Africa has recognized eleven languages for official purposes. However, this does not necessarily mean that large numbers of individuals in South Africa speak eleven languages, because in most instances the communities are separate. In South Africa the population is separated politically into nine provinces which have different dominant languages provincially, regionally and locally.

The South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act No 84 of 1996) states that:

1. Subject to the Constitution and this Act, the Minister may, by notice in the Government Gazette, after consultation with the Council of Education Ministers, determine norms and standards for language policy in public schools.
2. The governing body of a public school may determine the language of the school, subject to the Constitution, this Act and any applicable provincial law.
3. No form of racial discrimination may be practised in implementing policy determined under this section.
4. A recognised Sign Language has the status of an official language for purposes of learning at a public school. (pp. 5-6)

1.2. Statement of the Problem

1.2.1 English as a Medium of Instruction

There are fundamental differences between such Germanic languages as English and Afrikaans and the ancestral African languages. These differences give rise to linguistic problems where English is taught and learnt as an L2, and also if it is a medium of

instruction. They also give rise to the misinterpretation of errors, especially when English L1 speakers look at texts written by ESL speakers.

The fact that English is not the learner's L1, or even the L2, creates serious problems for the learner. Some black children are exposed to this language for the first time only when they start their formal education. There has always been a problem of the transition from the L1 to ESL for many black learners. When learners write in English, they make many errors. These errors are not exclusive to demotivated learners. Even the learners who are regarded as highly motivated and intelligent perform at lower levels of English proficiency than L1 speakers of English (Hubbard, Jones, Thornton & Wheeler, 1986).

Furthermore, linguistic errors are not only made in English as a subject, but also in History, Geography, Biology and many other subjects that are taught through the medium of English. These errors have adverse effects on the performance of learners in written tests and examinations.

Some linguistic errors have become "fossilized" (Ellis, 1997, p. 29), are resistant to correction and are regarded as the normal way of writing or speaking by teachers and students alike when both groups consist of L2 speakers of English. While this is not a problem within the population making these "errors", it does become a problem when the population is measured against a different standard, as is the case in nation-wide examinations.

The root of this problem may lie in the fact that English may be an entirely new language to the learner and is not related to his or her L1, and that there may be minimal exposure to spoken English in the daily life of black learners. More often than not, English

is spoken by black speakers/learners in a limited range of circumstances, many of which put pressure on the learner to perform well. Learners speak it in class when they have been instructed to do so by teachers, when carrying out tasks given by teachers, and sometimes when learners meet a stranger with whom they can only communicate through English. Otherwise, most of the time, learners communicate in their L1. The consequences of this may be that English becomes a language used under duress, a language in which learners are constantly judged and which they rarely use for purely communicative or pleasurable purposes.

It may also be possible that learners within a certain geographical area are exposed to some factors that may influence their acquisition of English. The findings of the study conducted by Msimanga (1999, p. 86), showed that there were certain patterns that the learners used. That led him to conclude that there could be certain linguistic patterns that marked the acquisition of English by a large majority of pupils in Phuthaditjhaba.

This researcher's observation in some of the schools visited in the northeastern Free State was that those learners who were exposed to English were better able to speak it than to write it. Often, the learners had no idea at all how to write an English word that they used frequently in their daily lives. This brings another element into the picture: the element of reading. The theory of internalization states that one must internalize experiences first, then one will be in a position to use them. The same applies to the writing skill; for learners to be able to write correctly they need to be exposed to reading, so that they internalize the visual image of the written word, which will help them to know and master aspects such as spelling and sentence structure (Kilfoil & van der Walt, 1996).

1.2.2 *The Teaching of English*

Though the focus of this research is on the writing skill, it must be emphasized that writing is a product of listening to English spoken, reading it and speaking it, and that therefore the manner in which all teachers use English has an impact on the written English of the learners (Askes & Kritzenger, 1995). Teachers of ESL themselves have difficulty with English. According to Macdonald and Burroughs (1991, p. 18), “teachers’ difficulty with English can be seen in the explanations they offer, in the summaries they make, and in the way they use materials, often in the way the materials were designed to be used.” Usually, teachers of subjects that are taught through the medium of English do not regard themselves as teachers of English. This attitude makes them careless when they use English in their teaching and in the notes that they give to the learners (Hubbard et al., 1986). This attitude also causes teachers to pay little attention to correcting language errors in their evaluation of the written tasks of the learners (Askes & Kritzenger, 1995; Kilfoil & van der Walt, 1996). Thus, no attempts are made to help the learners overcome such problems. As a result, only the teachers of English, who are themselves fallible, are left with the task of correcting the learners’ errors.

Common sense teaches us a very important lesson here: if the learners pass other subjects that are taught through the medium of English despite their poor writing skill, then they may not bother taking seriously the corrections made by the teacher of English. They may regard him/her as somebody who makes learning too difficult for them, and convince themselves to ignore the advice given.

From the experience and observations of the researcher as a teacher, it seems as if the problem is compounded by the fact that the writing skill receives little attention from teachers. Learners are given few opportunities to practise the writing skill, or are not given tasks that require them to write their thoughts, and, frequently, teachers do not bother to evaluate the written tasks of the learners (Kilfoil & van der Walt, 1996).

Apparently, marking the written work of the learners is a monster that teachers cannot handle easily (Macdonald & Burroughs, 1991; Askes & Kritzenger, 1995; Kilfoil & van der Walt, 1996). Some teachers mark the written tasks under duress, and those who evaluate them do so mainly for the purpose of marks that are needed to fill in the progress reports and examinations, and not for the purpose of mentoring the learners. It goes without saying that in a situation like this, the teacher will not be in a position to notice many of the errors that the learners have made, let alone trace their possible sources and their possible solutions. As long as learners do not understand why what they have written is wrong, there is a strong likelihood that the same error will be repeated over and over again. However, explaining why something is wrong does not, in itself, guarantee future absences of error, but may be essential to the process of error correction.

Langhan (as cited in Lemmer, 1995) goes a step further and puts the blame on teacher training/education institutions. The argument put forth is that teacher training does not equip teachers with the principles of language acquisition; consequently teachers seldom have the skills and knowledge to support black learners in the learning of ESL.

1.2.3 *Lack of Proficiency in Written English*

Some learners have developed an attitude of not bothering to learn the correct written form of some aspects of English. It would appear from the range of errors that learners make that many of them find writing to be the most difficult of all the language skills. The fact of the matter is that all learners represented by the population sample of this study are evaluated through written tests and examinations set in English. This is the unpleasant reality that teachers and learners must understand. The more inaccurate the learner is in written English, the more likely he or she is to perform very poorly in all subjects taught through English.

The writing skill, particularly in English, is arguably a major factor in determining the success or failure of learners at secondary schools. It is responsible for the marks that the learners get at the end of the year. In this case, English has considerable influence on the validity of learners' evaluations, that is, the extent to which their examinations measure what they are meant to measure. The examinations that black learners take are supposed to measure their knowledge of selected areas of content in particular subjects (for example: History, Agriculture, Biology, Geography, Biblical Studies, etc.), but their limited language proficiency (i.e. what is not supposed to be measured by the examinations) influences their results. This suggests that the examination results obtained by the learners who are L2 speakers of English might well be invalid, in that they may reflect not the lack of knowledge of the subject matter purportedly being tested, but rather the learner's competence in English. The final result is that a learner who is good at language but does not know the content will fail, while the one who knows the content but is poor at language may also fail. The latter is the one that is of utmost importance to this study, because learners who are good at

language struggle only to master the content, while those who are poor at language struggle with both the content and the language.

When marking the written examinations of the learners, teachers become aware of the fact that the learners understand the content but have a problem when it comes to conveying that information through the medium of English. In the assessment of learners through written texts, it would appear that the validity of the results is questionable, because the focus is on language knowledge rather on content knowledge.

Linguistic theorists divide language knowledge into two major aspects: competence and performance. Competence refers to the extent to which an individual knows the language, that is, knowledge of what is grammatically and socially correct (socially appropriate and acceptable register) in a language. Performance refers to what an individual produces when he speaks, reads or writes the language. Performance is that which occurs in practice. However, performance is an aspect of competence. The mentalist model of language learning puts emphasis on competence as an important component of language use, while the behaviourist model of language learning puts emphasis on performance as an important component of language use (Hubbard et al., 1986). Chomsky argues strongly that performance is not a true reflection of one's language competence: it is but the tip of an iceberg. According to him an individual has more competence than his/her performance reveals (Hubbard et al., 1986). Consequently, the written work of learners (i.e. performance) is not a true reflection of their competence. So examinations fail to measure the linguistic competence of learners.

There is an observable problem among secondary school learners of not being able to express their thoughts accurately in written English. They make a wide range of errors which often renders their writing difficult to understand. There is also a problem of differences in the perception of these errors by different people according to their linguistic background. For example, an L1 speaker of English who has no training in second language learning might perceive Sesotho speakers' errors to be signs of cognitive problems and consequently be led to award the learners lower marks than they truly deserve. A Sesotho-speaking marker might recognise the errors as being typical of all Sesotho speakers and not as signs of intellectual weakness. Such a marker might award a higher mark for the same piece of work. This problem may affect both the validity and the reliability of the examinations.

1.2.4 Conclusion

To sum up, black South Africans are, in the majority of cases, L1 speakers of ancestrally African languages, while white South Africans are mainly L1 speakers of one of two branches of the West Germanic languages of the Indo-European group. Inadequate learning of English, (exacerbated by the fundamental differences between African and European languages) by black learners gives rise to many problems in schools where English is both an L2 and a medium of instruction.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Given the very serious impact that linguistic ability in English has on general academic success, it is clear that research in this area is urgently called for. Something must be done

about how written English is taught and evaluated if black learners are to succeed in their learning.

The purpose of this study is threefold. First, it seeks to identify common errors that are made by black learners in secondary schools in written English. A second purpose is to examine the possible sources of such errors. A third purpose is to suggest possible solutions that could be applied in the classroom by teachers and learners, to avoid, prevent or correct errors.

The objective is to make teachers aware of the extent of the problem, and suggest some possible ways in which they can deal with it, because it is the business of educators to implement the measures that have been found valuable in remedying the problems that affect learning. This study aims ultimately to promote good writing skills and better ways of teaching writing to learners.

1.4 Research Questions

This study was conducted to attempt to answer the following questions:

- 1.4.1 What are the relatively common errors made by black learners from selected Phuthaditjhaba secondary schools in their written English?
- 1.4.2 What are the possible sources of such errors?

1.5 Hypotheses

This study seeks to test the following hypotheses:

- 1.5.1 Learners will make errors in the areas of syntax and lexis when they write in English.
- 1.5.2 One source of learners' errors will be their developing knowledge of the language (developmental errors).
- 1.5.3 One source of learners' errors will be the interference from their L1 (interference errors).

1.6 Operational Definition of Terms

The following concepts will be defined: common error, dominant language, official language, multilingualism, mother tongue/first language, target language, second language, foreign language, interlanguage, fossilisation, language acquisition/learning, error, mistake, negative feedback and positive feedback.

A *common error* is one that is found more than ten times in the randomly sampled compositions.

The *dominant language* is the principal language in a neighbourhood, district, region or country (*Encarta World English Dictionary*, 1999). In this study "dominant language" will refer specifically to Sesotho.

Official languages are the languages recognised by a country for legally binding purposes (Cook, 1991. p. 102).

Multilingualism refers to a situation where more than one language is used for everyday purposes (Cook, 1991, p. 102). It also refers to an individual's knowledge of more than two languages.

A *mother tongue* (native/first language/L1) is the first language somebody learns to speak as a child (in infancy) at home (*Encarta World English Dictionary*, 1999). In this study "mother tongue" will refer specifically to Sesotho.

A *second language* (L2) is a language acquired by a person in addition to his/her mother tongue and is used widely in a learner's environment (Cook, 1991). A second language has social and official functions within the community where it is learnt (Littlewood, 1984, p. 4). It is any language that is learnt after the mother tongue. In this study "the second language" will usually refer to English.

A *foreign language* is a language that does not have immediate and widespread use in the learner's environment. Such a language may be used minimally in the environment (Brown, 1994). A foreign language is learnt primarily for contact outside one's own community (Littlewood, 1984, p. 4). French or Spanish would be foreign languages in South Africa.

Interlanguage is a learner's version of the target language, a term suggesting a version between the mother tongue and the target language. It is the language system that the learner constructs out of the linguistic input to which she or he has been exposed (Selinker, 1972), and is considered as a language system in its own right, rather than as a defective version of the target language (Cook, 1991, p. 5). In short, interlanguage is a transitional target language system (Steinberg, 1982).

Fossilization is the process responsible for the cessation of learning at a stage short of target language competence (Ellis, 1997, p. 29).

A *target language* refers to a second or foreign language that is to be learnt (James, 1998). In this study the term “target language” will usually refer to English.

Krashen (1988) makes a distinction between *language learning* and *language acquisition*. According to him, language acquisition refers to learning a language in informal settings in which there is no formal teaching at all. A learner “picks” up a language subconsciously and gains implicit knowledge of the language from natural communication. Language learning, according to him, is the explicit conscious learning of a language that is helped by error correction and the presentation of explicit rules. This obviously involves formal teaching of a language. In this study, however, the two concepts will be used interchangeably, because the conditions that Krashen sets for language acquisition can also apply to language learning in South Africa.

Brown (1994) and Ellis (1997) define a *mistake* as a grammatical deviation made by someone who knows it is wrong. If such a person were to read/listen to that expression he/she could be in a position to correct it by himself/herself. Hubbard et al. (1986, p. 329) argue that a mistake is “a slip of the tongue etc. which the student can self-correct when challenged, because it is not caused by lack of knowledge.” A mistake is a non-systematic grammatical deviation.

An *error*, according to Brown (1994) and Ellis (1997), is a grammatical deviation made by someone who does not know that it is wrong and cannot self-correct. Such a deviation may be used repeatedly by the person in question for he/she does not know that it is wrong.

An error is a systematic deviation. According to Hubbard et al. (1986, p. 327), “an error is an imperfect production caused by a genuine lack of knowledge about the language.”

The difference between an error and a mistake is summed up in the following two quotations:

If a learner is inclined and able to correct a fault in his or her output it is assumed that the form he or she has selected was not the one intended, and we shall say that the fault is a mistake. If on the other hand, the learner is unable, or in any way disinclined to make the correction, we assume that the form the learner used was the one intended, and that it is an error. An error is therefore an instance of language that is unintentionally deviant and is not self-correctible by its author. (James, 1998, p. 78)

Whereas a mistake is a random performance slip caused by fatigue, excitement, etc., and therefore can be readily self-corrected, an error is a systematic deviation made by learners who have not yet mastered the rules of the L2. A learner cannot self-correct an error because it is a product reflective of his or her current stage of L2 development, or underlying competence. (Corder, as cited in Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p. 59)

In this study, however, all deviations will be regarded as errors because the procedures that are used to determine the differences between errors and mistakes cannot be used in the data-collection methods of this study.

Negative cognitive feedback is defined as “a barrage of interruptions, corrections, and overt attention to malformations” by the teacher-hearer (Brown, 1994, p. 220).

Positive cognitive feedback is defined as “willingness of the teacher-hearer to let errors go uncorrected, to indicate understanding when understanding may not have occurred” (Brown, 1994, p. 220).

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

2.1 Introduction: Language Acquisition

There is a strong argument that human beings need to learn a first language for communicative purposes (Yiptong, 1991). Accordingly, it is believed that the L1 is learnt more easily than the L2 because there is a need to communicate, which serves as a strong motivation for language learning. Moreover, a learner of an L1 usually has more than enough support, in terms of opportunities and “teachers”, in the facilitation of L1 learning. The home environment provides a learner with an environment that is rich in language input data (Asher, as cited in Yiptong, 1991).

Second language acquisition seems to have some barriers (Yule, 1985), especially in cases where it is learnt in a classroom setting. The fact of the matter is that an L2 is often learnt at a time when the learner has already acquired another language, the mother tongue, that is used for almost all communicative purposes and requirements (Yule, 1985). A learner may therefore not be highly motivated to learn an L2 seeing that he/she has a language to fall back on for communication purposes. However, this can change when an L2 learner goes and lives among mother-tongue speakers of the target language. There is a probability that he/she may learn that language because that environment is rich in language learning stimuli. In this case, L2 learning takes place through socialization with speakers of the target language (Steinberg, 1982).

Another barrier to successful second language learning that has received much attention is that of age. There is a theory that there is an age of optimal language acquisition. This is referred to as the critical period. The argument put forth is that after this period it becomes very difficult to acquire another language fully (Yule, 1985; Brown, 1994).

Researchers in second language acquisition have used different forms of models and analyses in an attempt to understand second language learning. In an attempt to overcome barriers to success, several methods and approaches have been proposed to promote second language acquisition, for example, the grammar translation method, the direct method, the audio-lingual approach and the communicative approach. Of major interest and significance to this study is the communicative approach, which differs from other approaches in its tolerance of errors (Yule, 1985). According to this approach, an error is “not something which hinders a student’s progress, but is probably a clue to the active learning progress being made by a student as she or he tries out strategies of communication in the new language” (Yule, 1985, p. 154).

2.2 A Brief History of Error Analysis Frameworks

The historical development of types of analyses of data that have been used by researchers indicates that there have been many changes in the way in which second language deviations have been viewed. First, it was contrastive analysis, which was based on the similarities and differences between the mother tongue and the target language in order to make predictions about the errors that a learner could commit. A major criticism against contrastive analysis was that in some cases it underpredicted and in others it overpredicted

(Dulay & Burt, as cited in Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). This was followed by error analysis, which was based on the premise that the starting point should be errors that learners make and then an attempt must be made to analyse their possible sources. The major criticism levelled against error analysis was that focussing on errors denied researchers access to the whole picture of learners' competence, and that it was impossible to come up with a definite source of an error, because the cause of an error may be ambiguous (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). After error analysis came performance analysis, which focussed on the analysis of learners' interlanguage performance. The criticism against it was that it focussed only on the learner's performance. Last was discourse analysis, which examined both the learner's performance and the input to the learner (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991).

A closer look at the various approaches mentioned above shows that some of them are subsumed in others and that many of them overlap with each other.

2.3 Major Theoretical Frameworks

There are two major theoretical frameworks of error analysis that are relevant to this study, namely: contrastive analysis and developmental analysis.

2.3.1 Contrastive Analysis of Learner Errors

According to Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991), from the 1940s to the 1960s, contrastive analysis was the most dominant form of data analysis. Much emphasis was placed on the role of the mother tongue in second language learning. Contrastive analysis was based on the premise that linguistic differences could be used to predict learning difficulty (Steinberg,

1982; Hatch, 1983; Klein, 1986; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Brown, 1994; Hoff-Ginsberg, 1997; James, 1998). It involves the systematic comparison of the two languages, that is, the mother tongue of the learner and the target language. The objective is to identify points of similarity and differences between the two languages. There was a strong belief that the learning of an L2 would be facilitated when similarities and differences were taken into consideration. That conviction gave rise to what became known as the contrastive analysis hypothesis. That hypothesis stipulated that where two languages were similar, positive transfer would occur, but where they were different, negative transfer, or interference, would result (Klein, 1986; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Hoff-Ginsberg, 1997). This hypothesis was founded on behaviourism, which held the view that language learning was a product of habit formation (Hoff-Ginsberg, 1997). The relationship between language learning and habit formation is summed up succinctly as follows:

Second language learning was viewed as a process of overcoming the habits of the native language in order to acquire the new habits of the target language. This was accomplished through pedagogical practices of dialogue memorisation, imitation and pattern practice. Overlearning and thus automaticity was the goal. The contrastive analysis hypothesis was important to this view of language learning, since if trouble spots in the target language could be anticipated, errors might be prevented or at least held to a minimum. In this way the formation of bad habits could be avoided. (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p. 55)

That hypothesis can be supported if a learner makes many errors in the areas of difference between the mother tongue and the target language, and makes relatively few or no errors in the areas where the two languages are similar. But, if a learner makes errors in the areas of similarity or makes relatively few or no errors in the areas of differences, the hypothesis is rejected (Hoff-Ginsberg, 1997).

Following this hypothesis, errors were classified on the basis of the mother tongue of the learner. In other words, *interlingual errors* were used as the category of errors that learners committed which could be traced to mother-tongue interference. Thus errors were conceived of as a result of interference between first and second language (Steinberg, 1982). According to Wardhaugh (as cited in Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991), this is the strong version of the contrastive analysis hypothesis.

2.3.2 *Developmental Analysis of Learner Errors*

According to Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982), the major contribution of error analysis is the controversial discovery that the majority of grammatical errors second language learners make do not reflect the learner's mother tongue but are very much like those young children make as they learn a first language.

Chomsky was opposed to the view of language learning as a product of habit formation. His view was that language is a result of rule formation.

Chomsky posited a theory in which humans were thought to possess a certain innate predisposition to induce the rules of the target language from the input to which they were exposed. Once acquired, these rules would allow learners to create and comprehend novel utterances, utterances they would neither have understood nor have produced were they limited to imitating input from the environment. (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p. 57)

This theory received support from researchers. The errors that were found by researchers indicated that L2 learners committed similar errors regardless of their mother tongue, and that there were similarities between L2 errors and errors made by L1 children learning their own language. These were often referred to as *developmental errors*, although Richards (as

cited in Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991) called them *intralingual errors*. In brief, developmental errors occur when learners attempt to apply the rules of the target language; that is, the difficulties in target language rules induce them to commit errors. Developmental errors can be classified into four categories, which are overgeneralisation, redundancy reduction, communication-based errors, and induced errors.

Richards (as cited in Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991) argues that overgeneralisation is caused by the learner's failure to observe the boundaries of a rule. Selinker (1974) describes communication-based errors as those which occur when speakers invoke communicative strategies, and Stenson (as cited in Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991) describes induced errors as those which are brought about by a teacher's sequencing or presenting two linguistic items in a way which creates confusion in the mind of the language learner.

Corder strongly maintains that errors are invaluable in the study of the language learning process. Learners' errors are not seen as something to be prevented, but as signs that learners are actively engaged in hypothesis testing which would ultimately result in the acquisition of target language rules. In his own words he maintains that:

A learner's errors provide evidence of the system of the language that he is using (i.e. has learned) at a particular point in the course (and it must be repeated that he is using some system, although it is not yet the right system). They are significant in three ways. First to the teacher, in that they tell him, if he undertakes a systematic analysis, how far towards the goal the learner has progressed and, consequently, what remains for him to learn. Second, they provide to the researcher evidence of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in his discovery of the language. Thirdly (and in a sense this is their most important aspect) they are indispensable to the learner himself because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn. It is a way the learner has of testing his hypotheses about the nature of the language he is learning. The making

of errors then is a strategy employed both by children acquiring their mother tongue and by those learning a second language. (Corder, 1974b)

This is supported by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen. (1982, p. 138), who argue that “people cannot learn language without first systematically committing errors.” According to them:

Learners’ errors provide data from which inferences about the nature of the language learning can be made and indicate to teachers and curriculum developers which part of the target language students have most difficulty producing correctly and which error types detract most from a learner’s ability to communicate effectively. (p.138)

Viewpoints like this one gave rise to the analysis of the language system that a learner uses in an endeavour to comprehend and master a second language. Such a language system is neither a learner’s mother tongue nor the second language that he/she attempts to learn, but a system between the two (Selinker, 1974). Brown (1994) maintains that by trial and error a learner gradually comes closer to the approximations of the language system used by mother tongue speakers of the target language. This intermediate stage is called the “idiosyncratic dialect” (Corder, 1974a), or “the approximative system” (Nemser, 1974), or “interlanguage” (Selinker, 1974). These three concepts have one thing in common, that is, a learner forms his/her own language system when trying to learn a second language. According to Brown (1994) the most viable way of analysing interlanguage is the study of learners’ speech and writing.

2.4 The Relevance of the Two Major Theoretical Frameworks to this Study

These theoretical frameworks serve as a mind-map for this study. Contrastive analysis takes the extreme position of viewing all of a learner’s errors as resulting from mother-

tongue interference. On the other hand, the developmental theory takes another extreme position of viewing all errors as an indication of the developmental level of the learner. The issue of learning being arrested at a particular level is not considered. This is a serious omission because some learners may make the same error for life. In a case like this, errors may not be regarded as an indication of the temporary stage where a learner is, but may serve to indicate that a learner is at a particular level and may fail to progress any further.

Contrastive Analysis has indicated that there is a possibility of mother-tongue interference, thus making us aware that in the analysis of errors we must not leave out the L1 of learners. Developmental theory has shown that not all errors are a result of mother-tongue interference. Some are a result of the target language itself, which may lead learners to make errors because of intrinsic complexities within the language.

A synthesis of the two major theoretical frameworks will be used in this study. The reason for doing this is so that one framework may make up for the weaknesses of the other. This study, therefore, proposes to draw from both contrastive analysis and developmental theories as the need arises.

2.5 Sources of Errors

The issue of sources of errors is a difficult one because there is a great deal of speculation involved in determining them. Brown (1994) identifies interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer and context of learning as sources of error. Interlingual transfer is said to be a source of errors in the early stages of second language learning. Intralingual transfer serves as a source of errors when learners have acquired parts of a second language and

generalize what they have acquired within the target language. The context of learning is said to be a source of errors when the materials and teachers lead a learner to make faulty hypotheses about the language. Brown (1994, p. 215) asserts that “students often make errors because of a misleading explanation from the teacher, faulty presentation of a structure or word in a textbook, or even because of a pattern that was rote memorised in a drill but not properly contextualised.”

2.6 Error Classification Systems

There are several taxonomies that are used to classify errors. According to Dulay et al. (1982), the most useful and commonly used bases for the descriptive classification of errors are linguistic category, surface strategy, comparative analysis and communicative effect.

Linguistic category taxonomies classify errors according to either language components or the particular linguistic constituent the error affects. Language components include phonology (pronunciation), syntax and morphology (grammar), semantics and lexicon (meaning and vocabulary) and discourse (style). This taxonomy is used by many researchers as a reporting tool to classify the errors they have collected.

A surface strategy highlights the ways surface structures are altered. Learners may omit necessary items or add unnecessary ones, they may misform or misorder them. Omission errors are characterized by the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance. Additions are characterized by the presence of an item which must not appear in a well-formed utterance; examples are double markings and regularizations. Misformation is characterized by the use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure; examples are

archi-forms and alternating forms. Misordering is characterized by the incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance. The advantage of an error analysis process based on this taxonomy is that it helps with the identification of cognitive processes that underlie learners' reconstructions of the new language and brings to the fore that learners' errors are based on some logic. They are not the result of laziness or sloppy thinking, but of the learner's use of interim principles to produce a new language.

The classification of errors in a comparative taxonomy is based on comparisons between the structure of L2 errors and certain other types of constructions. Usually the comparison is made between L2 errors and errors made by children learning the target language as their L1. This comparison has yielded the two major error categories in this taxonomy: developmental and interlingual errors.

The communicative-effect classification deals with errors from the perspective of their effect on the listener or reader. It focuses on distinguishing between errors that seem to cause miscommunication and those that do not. There are two major error categories in this taxonomy: global and local. Global errors affect the overall organization of the sentence and hinder successful communication, while local errors affect a single element of a sentence and usually do not hinder communication.

Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982, pp. 138-139) identify the following six categories as being among the most common errors: (1) Omission of grammatical morphemes (which are items that do not contribute much to the meaning of sentences), as in *"he hit car."* (2) Double marking a semantic feature (e.g. past tense) when only one marker is required, as in *"she didn't went back."* (3) Regularising rules, as in *"womans"* for *"women."* (4) Using

archi-forms, one form in place of several, such as the use of *her* for both *she* and *her*, as in "*I see her yesterday. Her dance with my brother.*" (5) Using two or more forms in random alternation, even though the language requires the use of each under certain conditions, as in the random use of *he* and *she* regardless of the gender of the person of interest. (6) Misordering items in constructions that require a reversal of word-order rules that had been previously acquired, as in "*what you are doing?*" or misplacing items that may be correctly placed in more than one place in the sentence, as in "*they are all the time late.*"

2.7 Error Classification

James (1998, p. 129) argues that errors can be classified on the basis of modality, medium and level. Modality refers to whether the learner's behaviour was receptive (reading or listening) or productive (speaking or writing), medium indicates whether the language produced or received was spoken (speech sounds) or written (written symbols) and level indicates the specific level of language in which the error was made. Three levels are identified: substance, text and discourse (see Table 1). The substance level involves errors of encoding (misspelling and mispronunciation) and decoding (miscues and misperception) which are made when a learner is operating the spelling (graphological) and pronunciation (phonological) systems. The discourse level involves errors of misformulation (misrepresenting speech and miscomposing text) and misprocessing (the misconstrual of speech and the misinterpretation of text) which occur in spoken and written discourse (James, 1998). The text level involves errors of composing (misspeaking and miswriting) and

understanding (mishearing and misreading) which are made when learners operate the lexico-grammatical systems to produce or process text.

Table 1

Levels of Error

1	Errors in encoding in speaking (Mispronunciation)	SUBSTANCE ERRORS
2	Errors in encoding in writing (Misspelling)	
3	Errors in decoding in hearing (Misperceptions)	
4	Errors in decoding in reading (Miscues)	
5	Errors in composing spoken text (Misspeaking)	TEXT ERRORS
6	Errors in composing written text (Miswriting)	
7	Errors in understanding spoken text (Mishearing)	
8	Errors in understanding written text (Misreading)	
9	Errors in formulating spoken discourse (Misrepresenting)	DISCOURSE ERRORS
10	Errors in formulating written discourse (Miscomposing)	
11	Errors in processing spoken discourse (Misconstrual)	
12	Errors in processing written discourse (Misinterpretation)	

Note: Adapted from James (1998, p. 130).

According to James (1998) lexical errors are classified into two major categories: formal errors of lexis and semantic errors in lexis. Formal errors in lexis have three categories, which are formal misselection, misformations and distortions. Formal misselection includes errors of malapropism, which are pairs or triplets of words that look and sound similar. Laufer (as cited in James, 1998, p. 145) calls them “synforms” and classifies them into four types: “the suffix type (e.g. consider<able>/consider<ate>); the

prefix type (e.g. <com>press/<sup>press); the vowel-based (e.g. seat/set); and the consonant-based type (e.g., prize/price)."

Misformations are errors in which learners produce "words" that are non-existent in the target language. These can originate either in the mother tongue or be created by the learner from the resources of the target language itself. Those that are created for the target language from L1 resources are known as interlingual misformation errors. They are of three types, namely: "borrowing (if the mother tongue word is used in the target language with no perception of any need to tailor it to its new host code, e.g., I shoot him with gun in *kopf [a German word for head]); coinage (if a new word derived from the L1 is tailored to the structure of the target language, presumably because the learners think there is a trusty friend e.g. "*massacrate" [massacre]); and calques (if the L2 word created is the result of literal translation of an L1 word e.g. "*sleep suit [pyjamas])" (James, 1998, pp.149-150).

Distortions are intralingual errors of form created by the learners from the resources of the target language. "They result from the misapplication of the processing operations such as (a) omission: e.g. int(e)resting, (b) overinclusion: e.g. fresh(er)men, (c) misselection: e.g. *delitouse (delicious), (d) misordering: e.g. *littel (little), and (e) blend: e.g. the *deepths of the ocean (depth + deeps)" (James, 1998, p. 150).

Semantic errors in lexis involve the use of forms that exist in the target language but these forms do not represent the meanings the speaker or writer wishes to express. There are two categories of such errors: confusion of sense relations and collocational errors. Confusion of sense relations results from the use of near-synonyms or assumed synonym which Room (as cited in James, 1998) calls "distinguishables." These are pairs (or more) of

words that are semantically germane but can be differentiated. They are not true synonyms like “lift/elevator, serviette/napkin.” James (1998, p. 151) identifies four major types which are:

- (a) Using a more general term where a more specific one is needed (superonym for hyponym). The result is an underspecification of the meaning e.g. “The flowers had a special*smell (scent/perfume).”
- (b) Using a too specific term where a more general one is needed (hyponym for superonym) e.g. “The *colonels (officers) live in a castle.”
- (c) Using the less apt of two co-hyponyms e.g. “They made a decision to *exterminate (eradicate) dialects” and “she is my *nephew.”
- (d) Using the wrong one from a set of near-synonyms e.g. “He is a *regretful (penitent/contrite) criminal or sinner.”

A collocation consists of the other words any particular word normally keeps company with. There are three degrees of collocation: semantically determined word selection, e.g. “crooked stick” but not “*crooked year”; combinations with statistically weighted preferences, e.g. “an army has suffered *big losses” where heavy losses” is preferred; and arbitrary combinations, e.g. we “make an attempt” and “have a try” but cannot “*have an attempt” and “make a try.” Other examples may be “fish and chips” and not “*chips and fish” (James, 1998, p. 152).

Grammar errors are divided into morphology and syntax. Morphology handles word structures. Morphology errors are therefore errors which involve a failure to comply with the

norms of the parts of speech. Syntax handles structures larger than single words. Syntax errors affect phrases, clauses, sentences and paragraphs.

2.8 Error Correction

Before errors can be corrected they must be identified and classified. According to James (1998) the process of error analysis involves four steps, namely: (1) the detection of an error in writing or speech, (2) the location of an error, (3) the description of an error; and (4) the classification of an error. Detection of an error involves sensing that there is an error in a sample text or speech. Location of an error involves specifying where an error has occurred (that is, in a sentence, a word, etc.). Description of an error involves describing an error in detail, and classification follows on description by categorizing an error into its specific category. These steps are reinforced by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (as cited in James, 1998, pp. 104-105), who assert that “the linguistic category classification carries out specification of errors in terms of linguistic categories, in terms of where an error is located in the overall system of the target language based on the linguistic item which is affected by the error.” According to Brown (1980) there are four categories of errors, namely: substitution, omission, addition and word order. This model is useful for the description of errors.

After errors have been identified, described and classified, the process of correcting them may start. However, the correction of errors that are made by second language learners seems to be a highly debatable issue. There is apparently no agreement among authors on this issue about the manner in which it must be carried out. However, there is no doubt that some

form of error correction is necessary and it is a positive step towards second language learning. Hendrickson (as cited in Brown, 1987) asserts that teachers should differentiate between global and local errors. Global errors need to be corrected because they hinder communication by preventing the hearer or reader from understanding the message, which is usually not the case with local errors that usually affect a single element of a sentence.

Hendrickson (as cited in Chaudron, 1988) argues strongly that error correction should be confined more to "manipulative grammar practice," leaving communicative activities free from a focus on error correction. Specifically, according to him, errors that must be corrected are those that impair communication significantly, those that have a highly stigmatizing effect on the listener or reader, and those that occur frequently in students' speech and writing. He also argues that errors should be corrected by the teacher, the learner making the errors and the other learners.

The Teachability and Learnability Hypothesis of Pienemann (as cited in Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, pp. 272, 280) and Ellis (1997, p. 82) seem to caution that there are some errors that cannot be corrected as long as learners are not linguistically ready to learn them. In a way, this hypothesis puts a teacher in a difficult situation because it might be too difficult for the teacher to know which learners are ready for certain linguistic structures and which learners are not yet ready for such structures.

The Natural Hypothesis of Krashen and Terrell (1983) recommends no direct treatment of errors at all. This again puts teachers in a difficult situation because teachers see it as their business to correct errors. They fear that if they leave all errors to occur without making corrections, such errors may be reinforced and be regarded as correct by the learners.

Long (as cited in Brown, 1994, p. 220) suggests that after the teacher has noticed an error, he/she must decide whether it needs correction or not. Such a decision will be made on the basis of "the importance of the error to the current pedagogical focus on the lesson and the teacher's perception of the chance of eliciting correct performance from the student if negative feedback is given."

Brown (1994) argues, in his analysis of Vigil and Oller's model for a theory of error correction, that cognitive feedback must be optimal in order to be effective. There must not be too much negative correction because it may make learners refuse to learn a second language, as they get almost everything wrong. On the other hand there must not be too much positive feedback because it may lead to fossilization of the errors.

Finally it becomes clear that a teacher is left to make informed decisions concerning the correction of errors.

2.9 Summary

For the purpose of this study a synthesis of the various approaches of data analysis will be used. This means that the study will use the process of analysis that has some elements of contrastive analysis, error analysis, performance analysis and discourse analysis. This is done so that each form of analysis may still account for some of the errors committed, and the fact that no approach has totally replaced those coming before it. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) sum this up as follows:

As we have traced the development of the modes of SLA [second language acquisition] inquiry, we have seen how each new type of analysis broadened our perspective and made its own contribution. It would be untrue to say that each type of analysis replaced its predecessors, however. Rather, we could

say it subsumed what came before it. For instance, we saw that those that practiced error analysis appealed to contrastive analysis to explain a portion of the errors that learners commit. Likewise, since learner errors are part of a learner's performance, error analysis has a role to play in performance analysis. And finally, the learner's total performance must be taken into account in any discourse analysis. (p.73)

It is also very important to point out that this research makes a suggestion that there is a need to correct errors rather than leaving them with the hope that they will automatically fade away.

Chapter Three

Methods and Procedures

3.1 Introduction

This study sought to investigate relatively common errors in the writing of a group of learners asked to write a descriptive composition. The contention is that language plays a pivotal role in the learning process: it can determine the success or failure of learners. If learners are proficient in the language of instruction, there is every likelihood that they will succeed in their learning because they will be able to express their thoughts and ideas without linguistic hindrances. On the other hand, if learners are not proficient in the language of instruction, there is every likelihood that they will not succeed because they may struggle with the language more than with the content, and they may even fail to express their ideas and thoughts appropriately. "Language is a crucial means of gaining access to important knowledge and skills. It is the key to cognitive development and can promote or impede scholastic success" (Ovando, as cited in Lemmer, 1995, p. 82). The line of argument taken is that language influences thought and that language is the vehicle of thought.

This chapter describes the design, population and sample, measures and materials, data collection process, coding system, and data analysis procedures.

3.2 Research Design

The research questions asked necessitated a descriptive-analytical cross-sectional study. This study was non-causal in nature. There was minimal interference with the subjects in the study; the only interference being in the administration of the instrument and data collection. The study took place in a natural learning environment and the unit of analysis was a group of learners in grade 11 selected by the sampling technique described below.

3.3 Participants

The administration of schools in the Republic of South Africa is highly centralized. The national minister of education is responsible for all educational matters in the country. In each of the nine provinces there is a member of the executive committee (MEC) for education (see Appendix A). The schools in each province are grouped into districts. The MEC is responsible for all the districts in the province. Each district has a number of schools falling within its administration. The district manager (DM) is the highest officer in each district and inspectors/school management developers (SMDs), subject developers and physical planners report to him/her. There is also a human resources section in each district.

The same guidelines are issued by the national minister of education to each MEC, and by the MEC to each DM in the province, and by the DM through the SMDs to the school. All schools in a province follow the same syllabus, use the same prescribed books and function according to the same departmental regulations, at each grade. The schools in the Free State province write the same matriculation examination, which is marked at a common centre in Bloemfontein, the provincial capital.

The schools from which the subjects in the research were drawn had a total of 192 school days in 1999. There are five school days per week. Learners are expected to spend about seven hours at school per day. All these schools are mixed schools in terms of gender.

The population for the study was all learners who were in grade 11 (previously standard 9) in 1999 within the Phuthaditjhaba district of the northeastern Free State. Originally, the researcher wanted to use grade 12 learners, but because permission to conduct the research was received very late, when grade 12 was writing examinations, the researcher chose grade 11 because it is the closest to grade 12. It was the 1998 final examination performance of the grade 12 students which was used as a predictor of the schools where fewer or more errors in written English might be expected to occur.

The target population of this study comprised learners who fall into the category of subtractive bilingualism. Most of them spoke at least three or four languages. The mother might be a native Sesotho speaker, the father a native Sesotho speaker and both speak Sesotho to the child from birth, with Sesotho as the dominant language of the community. However, at school a learner is required to know English and Afrikaans, which exposes the learner to two more languages. There are also cases where the mother may be a native speaker of isiZulu, the father a native speaker of Sesotho, with each speaking his/her own language to the child, while Sesotho is the dominant language of the community. At school the learner may be required to know English and Afrikaans, which exposes the learner to four languages: Sesotho, isiZulu, English and Afrikaans. The dominant language of the population of this study is Sesotho. The majority of the learners in the study come from a low socio-economic background. The mother tongue of the majority is Sesotho. Even those who

claim that their mother tongue is another language, have registered in Sesotho mother-tongue classes at school and their “mother tongue” is used minimally in their homes.

Subject selection was conducted as follows: The sixteen secondary schools in the Phuthaditjhaba district were ranked from the highest to the lowest on the basis of their overall performance (average percentage) in the 1998 matriculation examination. Thereafter, they were divided into three strata, the top stratum (highest in terms of academic achievement), the middle stratum and the bottom stratum. The sample consisted of three schools, one selected from each stratum by using the stratified random sampling technique of probability sampling design. That is, one from the top two schools in the top stratum, one from the middle two schools in the middle stratum and one from the bottom two schools in the bottom stratum (see Table 2). That was done to avoid chance factors in which two schools from different strata, which were close to each other in terms of the 1998 matriculation examination performance, would be selected (e.g.. the bottom school of the top stratum and the top school of the middle stratum). Thus, there was one school from each of the three strata.

Table 2

Summary of how Schools were Selected

Stratified Random Sampling of Schools	
Top Stratum (Between 46 % And 85 %)	
Position	School
1	School A*
2	School B
3	School C
4	School D
5	School E
Middle Stratum (Between 29 % And 45 %)	
6	School F
7	School G
8	School H*
9	School I
10	School J
Bottom Stratum (Between 20 % And 28 %)	
11	School K
12	School L
13	School M
14	School N
15	School O*
16	School P

Note: An * indicates a randomly selected school.

At each of the selected schools an intact class of grade 11 students constituted the sample of the study. This was done so that the smooth running of the schools was not disturbed in any way. Grade 11 classes in the schools in the area of study were divided on the basis of a science stream, a commercial stream and a general stream. Classes were selected on the basis of the same subject stream in all the three schools. A science stream was randomly selected. Subsequently, only grade 11 science stream classes were selected. There were several grade 11 science classes at each school, thus one science class was randomly selected per school. This was done to eliminate the variable of differences in ability and level of academic motivation that may be associated with different subject streams. One hundred and eight (108) grade 11 learners participated in this study, forty (40) from the school in the top stratum, twenty-eight (28) from the school in the middle stratum and forty (40) from the school in the bottom stratum.

3.4 Measures and Materials

Data collection was based on the written composition tasks. The researcher designed a descriptive composition task. There was one topic for all the learners in the study, namely: "A Detailed Description of My Home Area." The researcher chose this form of composition because it would easily elicit language to analyse. Learners would have information to write about because the topic was non-fictional and could be assumed to be familiar to all learners. The topic is similar to those asked in the matriculation examination for English.

The descriptive composition task was designed such that it tested the learners' ability to express themselves in writing, and afforded them with the opportunity to apply knowledge that had been gained in any subject or from any other source of information. For example, in describing a graveyard in the manner indicated below, the learner has used knowledge gained from mathematics, history, and geography:

There is a graveyard in my area which was established about two decades ago. It is in the middle of the village and its size is about 900 square metres. About half the graves are made of heaps of soil and stones, while others are beautifully constructed with concrete tombstones. This graveyard is not tidy. [Manufactured data]

The underlying aim was to challenge learners in the production of ideas and to see the extent to which they were able to express their ideas in writing. The choice of the non-fictional topic was an attempt to help learners to write about practical things and avoid an composition that would require too much imagination or creativity.

3.5 Procedures

The researcher sought permission from the Department of Education, Free State Province, which authorised him to conduct research in the selected three secondary schools in the Phuthaditjhaba district (see Appendix B for the official response). The researcher also sought permission from the school principals and from the teachers of English in the classes from which data were collected (see Appendices C and D). Finally, he sought permission from the learners themselves (see Appendix E).

The descriptive composition was validated by conducting a pilot study at one school in one grade 11 class. Amendments were made to the protocol of the instrument after the pilot

study. The instrument was administered on normal school days at each of the selected schools in the selected classes. Learners were allowed only one hour. The learners at the three schools were given the same guidelines and protocol (see Appendix F). Learners were also provided with answer sheets on which to write the composition. The compositions were collected and analysed to provide the information on written English which was needed for the study.

3.6 Data Analysis

The schools from the top, middle and bottom strata were called Schools X, Y and Z respectively. All the scripts of each group were randomly given labels, e.g. X01, X02, Y01, Y02, Z01, Z02 etc. A table of random numbers was used to select ten compositions from each group, which were analysed for errors. A table for recording errors was designed on the basis of the errors that were found (see Table 3).

Table 3

Coding System of Grammatical Errors

Grammatical Category	Classification of Errors
Verb	Missing Redundant Wrong choice Tense Subject verb concord/agreement
Article	Missing Redundant Wrong choice
Preposition	Missing Redundant Wrong choice
Singular/plural Nouns	Singular for plural Plural for singular
Pronouns	Missing Redundant Wrong choice

As can be seen in the table above, a traditional grammatical category taxonomy has been used to organize the errors collected.

Ultimately, the most frequent errors were grouped into (a) grammatical, (b) lexical and (c) other errors. Grammatical errors were in turn grouped into five categories, namely: verb errors, article errors, preposition errors, singular-plural noun errors and pronoun errors.

The verb errors were sub-categorized into missing verbs (auxiliary and main verbs that were not used when they should have been used), redundant verbs (verbs and auxiliary verbs that were used when they should not have been used), wrong verb choice (using verbs

inappropriately), tense (using the present tense when a past tense should have been used and vice versa) and subject verb concord/agreement errors.

Article errors were sub-categorized into missing articles, redundant articles and wrong article choice (using “a” instead of “the” or vice versa).

Preposition errors were sub-categorized into missing, redundant and wrong preposition choice.

Plural-singular noun errors were sub-categorized into singular for plural (using a singular form where a plural form should have been used) and plural for singular (using a plural form where a singular form should have been used).

Pronoun errors were sub-categorized into missing, redundant and wrong choice.

Lexical errors formed a category of their own. They were grouped into spelling and semantic errors. The semantic errors were those involving confusion of sense relations in which learners used the wrong word from a set of near-synonyms. This category covered errors involving the use of a word incorrectly because its meaning was not well-understood.

There were other errors which occurred, relating to the pronoun “there” (as in “there are lions in Kruger National Park”). These, however, were relatively infrequent (fewer than 10 in all 30 compositions) and were recorded separately. Examples will be given in the latter part of the following chapter.

The thirty compositions were not of equal length. In some cases, they differed markedly. There was therefore a need to standardize them. In order to control for length, only the first 200 words of each composition were analyzed for errors, which were then recorded in the

categories described above. The categories of errors were arranged according to the frequency of errors from the highest to the lowest.

Chapter Four

Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This study examined common errors made by learners in written ESL. The major objective was to locate the source of such errors. This chapter begins with the results of grammatical errors and ends with the results of lexical errors.

In sections 4.2 to 4.6, the various kinds of grammatical errors made by the learners will be examined. First, the overall percentage of all learners in each error sub-category will be described, then how each group performed in that sub-category, and finally the overall performance of each group in the category will be summarized. In section 4.7, lexical errors will be examined. In section 4.8, other errors that were made but not recorded in the table will be given. In section 4.9, the various error categories within each school will be compared and described, then the overall totals of the three groups on each error category will be given, and finally the overall performance of each group will be given. In the verbatim examples of data, only the focus error is marked with an asterisk, and the words within parentheses indicate a suggested correct form.

Percentages within categories have been rounded to the nearest whole number. They may therefore not add up to 100%. Appendices G1 to G3 summarize the findings of this study.

4.2 Verb Errors

4.2.1 Verb Tense Errors

Verb tense errors were the most frequent kind of error in this category. They accounted for 32% (38 out of 120) of all the verb errors made by the learners. The learners in School Z (the school with the lowest matriculation results) had the highest share (20 out of 38 or 53%) of the errors in this sub-category, followed by school Y, the medium-ranked school, with 29% (11 out of 38) and school X, the highest-ranked school, with 18% (7 out of 38) (see Appendix G1: tense error subtotals and grand totals). For example:

“At my home area we *had (have) stores and many things”.

“The location *was (is) beatiful because was biggest building like Naledi mall.”

“But you will arrive which I *gave (give) you a good direction.”

“They *are (were) fighting for want to be independent and ruling ahead by their leader old Xhosa woman named Nomalanga.”

“We *had (have) a many people who liked the same business sometimes he or she sell some oranges, tomato and many others.”

In some instances learners inflected for the past tense on the main verb instead of on the auxiliary verb. For example:

“If you turn to the leftern side you can *saw (see) another school called Bonamelo Collage of Education on the left.”

“When I see my home area it have a most things we can *used (can use).”

In other instances, learners inflected for the past tense in an infinitive construction. For example:

“The many people like to *visited (visit) Phuthaditjhaba at the weekends but ...”

“I and the other taxi rant other people inwich the black and white people to help the people to *succeded the teacher (succeed).”

4.2.2 *Missing Verbs*

Missing auxiliary and main verbs accounted for 29% (35 out of 120) of verb errors. School Z with 37% (13 out of 35) had the highest frequency of such errors. Schools X and Y were similar, with 31% (11 out of 35) each (see Appendix G1). For example:

“After you must find taxi rank which *called (is called) Itshokolele Transport.”

“I am living at Qwaqwa *found (which is found) in Eastern Free State.”

“The firs two *found (are found) in factries, and the second in Fairways.”

4.2.3 *Wrong Verb Choice*

Wrong verb choice accounted for 23% (28 out of 120) of verb errors. School X with 36% (10 out of 28) had the highest frequency of such errors. Schools Y and Z were similar with 32% (9 out of 28) each (see Appendix G1). For example:

“When you want to go to Fairways you just *rise (raise) your fingers.”

“And this place has a small town called Setsing some of call it a town some of us call it Setsing because it do not *consist of (have) Shoprite and OK so they think it is not a town without that.”

“I tell you guys when you just *go (come) to my region you’ll fill exicted that you believe you’ll never *come (go) back to your region.”

4.2.4 Redundant Verbs

Redundant verbs accounted for 16% (19 out of 120) of verb errors. School Z with 47% (9 out of 19) of these had the highest frequency of such errors, followed by school X with 42% (8 out of 19) and school Y with 11% (2 out of 19) (see Appendix G1). For example:

“Because people *are (omit) believe the streetkids are they not to catch some other place.”

“The most of people *are (omit) talk Zulu and other language.”

“I *am (omit) live Randfontein Mohlakeng.”

School Z with (51 out of 120 or 43%) had the highest frequency of errors in this category, followed by School X with 36 out of 120 or 30%, and school Y had 33 out of 120 or 28% (see Appendix G1 and Table 4).

Table 4

A Comparison of the Three Groups on the Different Error Categories

No.	Error Category	School X	School Y	School Z	Total
1	Verb	30%	28%	43%	100%
2	Article	22%	37%	41%	100%
3	Preposition	26%	26%	48%	100%
4	Singular/plural Nouns	40%	20%	41%	100%
5	Pronoun	37%	29%	33%	100%

Note: Percentages within categories have been rounded to the nearest whole number. They may therefore not add up to 100%.

As can be seen in the table above, groups of learners sometimes had difficulties in different grammatical categories, and sometimes in the same categories. School Z, from the bottom stratum, had the highest frequency of errors in the verb, article, preposition and singular-plural noun error categories. School X, from the top stratum, had the highest frequency of errors in the pronoun error category. School Y, from the middle stratum, performed much better than School X, from the top stratum, in all error categories except the article and preposition error categories.

4.2.5 *Subject-verb Concord/agreement Errors*

In some instances learners had problems with subject verb concord. For example:

“And this place has a small town called Setsing some of call it a town some of us call it Setsing because it *do (does) not consist of Shoprite and OK so they think it is not a town without that.”

“The people of my area are not jealous, maybe when someone *have (has) anything they don’t go and make the bad thing.”

“Other people of the area at Free State except my area they like this area, because other thing the people *says (say) that Bethlehem is the area where Jesus was born at.”

“The area *have (has) the rivers and other shops.”

“My home area *have (has) small light industries and taxi rank and beatiful stadium which is called Charles Mopeli Stadium.”

“My home area is situated in Matsikeng village. Matsikeng *have (has) so many building houses.”

“When I see my home area it *have (has) many thing we can used.”

4.3 Article Errors

4.3.1 Missing Articles

Missing articles were the most frequent in this sub-category. They accounted for 39% (66 out of 169) of article errors. School Z with 41% (27 out of 66) had the highest frequency of such errors, followed by school Y with 33% (22 out of 66) and school X with 26% (17 out of 66) (see Appendix G1). For example:

“Here I describe *area (the area) where I live.”

“I live at *place (a place) called Dithotaneng.”

“In my home area we have *small town (a small town) and many a church and many schools.”

“It’s big builder schools and you’ll see *Buses Dept (the Bus Dept) on *left hand side (the left hand side) that schools on *right (the right) hand side.”

“I am not *Englishman (an Englishman) but I do my best.”

“Nexst to *Fish and Chip shop (the Fish and Chip shop) is a Clocolan hotel called *Royal Hotel (the Royal Hotel).”

4.3.2 Redundant Articles

Redundant articles accounted for 31% (53 out of 169) of article errors. School Z with 47% (25 out of 53) had the highest frequency of such errors, followed by school X with 28% (15 out of 53) and school Y with 25% (13 out of 53) (see Appendix G1). For example:

“*The (omit) most of the people are likely the area.”

“Phuthaditjhaba it has *a (omit) many schools like Kholathuto, Reahola and Akofang and it has many student how are atend at that schools.”

“Lesotho is in *the (omit) South Africa and it has borders 10 borders around the country to RSA.”

“The many people like to visited Phuthaditjhaba at the weekends but all most when it is a hollydays because it has *a (omit) many places to rest like Qwaqwa hotel or Phuthaditjhaba hall.”

“One important thing about Qwaqwa is that we have chiefs in our village, for *an (omit) example I’m living in Mangaung and my chief is Tebo.”

“We had *a (omit) many people who liked who liked the same business sometimes he or she sell some oranges, tomato and many others.”

“Then you pass straight when the taxi is going on the right hand side you’ll see a Technicon which is called *a (omit) Boitjhorisong Technicon.”

4.3.3 *Wrong Article Choice*

Wrong article choice accounted for 30% (50 out of 169) of article errors. School Y with 54% (27 out of 50) had the highest frequency of such errors, followed by school Z with 36% (18 out of 50) and school X with 10% (5 out of 10) (see Appendix G1). For example:

“The area they have *a (the) farmers teacher and social work to help other the people.”

“It has three bucharies and a Shop of Fish and Chips nexst to Fish and Chips shop is *a (the) Clocolan hotel called Royal Hotel. It the end of that street is *a (the) Bottle Store

that called Francies Bottle store. Along the other street called Moosas street is a school called Thoteng High school and at the left of that school is *a (the) small town hall.”

School Z with 41% (70 out of 169) had the highest frequency of article errors, followed by School Y with 37% (62 out of 169) and school X had 22% (37 out of 169) (see Appendix G1 and Table 4).

4.4 Preposition Errors

4.4.1 Missing Prepositions

Missing prepositions accounted for 29% (27 out of 92) of preposition errors. School Z with 56% (15 out of 27) had the highest frequency of such errors, followed by school X with 30% (8 out of 27) and school Y with 15% (4 out of 27) (see Appendix G2). For example:

“I am live *Randfontein (in Randfontein) Mohlakeng.”

“The people that live *Bluegumbosch (in Bluegumbosch) they are very peacefull.”

“We find that this area is *the west (in the west) *at (of) the Free State.”

“I live nearest *the shopping centre (to the shopping centre).”

4.4.2 Redundant Prepositions

Redundant prepositions accounted for 20% (18 out of 92) of preposition errors. Schools X, Y and Z were similar with 33% (6 out of 18) each (see Appendix G2). For example:

“Other people of the area at Free State except my area they like this area, because other thing the people says that Bethlehem is the area where Jesus was born *at (omit).”

“My home area is Tseki village behind *to (omit) Dinare Secondary School.”

4.4.3 *Wrong Preposition Choice*

Errors involving the wrong choice of a preposition were the most frequent in this sub-category. They accounted for 51% (47 out of 92) of preposition errors. School Z with 49% (23 out of 47) had the highest frequency of such errors, followed by school Y with 30% (14 out of 47) and school X with 21% (10 out of 47) (see Appendix G2). For example:

“Must go *with (to) the right hand side from Setsing ...”

“Lesotho is in the South Africa and it has borders 10 borders [posts] around the country
*to (with) RSA.”

“We find that this area is [in] the west *at (of the) Free State.”

School Z with 48% (44 out of 92) had the highest frequency of preposition errors. Schools X and Y were similar with 26% (24 out of 92) each (see Appendix G2 and Table 4).

4.5 *Singular/plural Noun Errors*

4.5.1 *Singular Form Instead of Plural Form*

The use of the singular instead of the plural form of nouns was the most frequent error in this sub-category. It accounted for 89% (99 out of 111) of errors. School Z with 42% (42 out of 99) had the highest frequency of such errors, followed by school X with 36% (36 out of 99) and school Y with 21% (21 out of 99) (see Appendix G3). For example:

“The most people are talk Zulu and other *language (languages).”

“In my home area they have many small *road (roads).”

“...You’ll see a location which called Elite before you see that location you’ll see two
*school (schools) next to that tired road ...”

“The *school (schools) are very long of my home, are very distance.”

“Qwaqwa it has many *thing (things) like towns, villages.”

“It will surply you with many *thing (things) if you want it as a human being.”

“We have four taxi *rank (ranks) first two is for local *taxi (taxis) and the last two is
for long distance.”

4.5.2 *Plural Form Instead of Singular Form*

The use of the plural instead of the singular accounted for 11% (12 out of 111) of singular/plural errors. School X with 67% (8 out of 12) had the highest frequency of such errors, followed by school Z with 25% (3 out of 12) and school Y with 8% (1 out of 12) (see Appendix G3). For example:

“Lesotho is a small country with ten districts, and each *districts (district) has own town
...”

School Z with 41% (45 out of 111) had the highest frequency of singular/plural errors, followed by School X with 40% (44 out of 111) and school Y had 20% (22 out of 111) (see Appendix G3 and Table 4).

4.6 Pronoun Errors

4.6.1 Missing Pronouns

Missing pronouns were the most frequent error in this sub-category. They accounted for 46% (36 out of 78) of all pronoun errors. School X with 52% (29 out of 36) had the highest frequency of such errors, followed by school Z with 25% (9 out of 36) and school Y with 22% (8 out of 36) see (Appendix I). For example:

“I am living at Qwaqwa *found (which is found) in Eastern Free State.”

“Lesotho is a small country with ten districts, and each districts has *own (its own) town ...”

“I live in Bluegumbosch and *is (it is) found around Qwaqwa.

“And this place has a small town called Setsing some *of (of us) call it a town some of us call it Setsing because it do not consist of Shoprite and OK so they think *is (it is) not a town without that.”

“I like my home area because *is (it is) the area that is so very cool.”

4.6.2 Redundant Pronouns

Redundant pronouns accounted for 44% (34 out of 78) of pronoun errors. School Z with 44% (15 out of 34) had the highest frequency of such errors, followed by school Y with 38% (13 out of 34) and school X with 18% (6 out of 34) (see Appendix G3). For example:

“The area *they (omit) have a farmers, teacher and social work to help other the people.”

“Qwaqwa *it (omit) has many thing like towns, villages.”

“The people that live Bluegumbosch *they (omit) are very peacefull.”

“Setsing it is not clear because some people *they (omit) dump tin and bottle in place that he/she likes to dump it.”

“Setsing *it (omit) is very big the are shops that are to expensive.”

“Phuthaditjhaba *it (omit) has a many schools like Kholathuto, Reahola and Akofang and it has many student how are atend at that schools.”

4.6.3 *Wrong Pronoun Choice*

Wrong pronoun choice accounted for 10% (8 out of 78) of pronoun errors. School X with 50% (4 out of 8) had the highest frequency of such errors. Schools Y and Z were similar, with 25% (2 out of 8) each (see Appendix G3). For example:

“The first thing that *your (you) meet when you arrive is factries.”

“It is the a small area from *their (its) neighboring towns.”

School X with 37% (29 out of 78) had the highest frequency of pronoun errors, followed by School Z with 33% (26 out of 78) and school Y had 29% (23 out of 78) (see Appendix G3 and Table 4).

4.7 *Lexical Errors*

4.7.1 *Spelling Errors*

There were instances in which learners used wrong spelling of English words such as the following:

School X learners made the following errors:

"If you come *hear (here) in Qwaqwa it will serve you in all the thing you need.

"We have *collages (colleges) and universities like Bonamelo College of Education, Tshiya college of education etc."

"The people of our are *bilieve (believe) in witchcraft."

"In my home area we have lots of rivers and *order (other) thing which Qwaqwa have is mountain."

"Qwaqwa it will *surply (supply) you with many thing if you want it as a human being."

"From town you can see the mountains and some *vilages (villages)."

"I live in Sebokeng village there are *my (many) thing helpening in my village."

"When you want to go to Fairways you just *rise (raise) four fingers"

"I don't *no (know) the length of the area that I live in because is too big."

"The first thing that your meet when you arrive is *factries (factories)."

"In that olden times if you were accused you were of *robbery (robbery) you were going to be punished up in chief's camp."

"The people that live Bluegumbosch they are very *peacefull (peaceful)

School Y learners made the following errors:

"My favourite dish is *checken (chicken), pumpkin, beetroot and bull-brand."

"From Setsing you pass through until you see murrituas tarven you *carve (curve) easy are long you *carve (curve) again you go straight."

"It has Qwaqwa hotel so that if you are a *visiter (visitor) at my home area you can go to the hotel to find some good food, sleep or to enjoy with your friends."

“I *leave (live) at Bluegumbosch from Setsing you pass through until you see Maurrituas tarvern.”

“We see the tuck shop and school and *shark (shack) house.”

“There is *imformation (information) centre, that *imformation (information) centre is used, like you don’t know Bluegumbosch you will go to *imformation (information) centre.”

“You will see a *motuary (mortuary) a funeral *Palour (parlour) on the left hand side.”

“If we go to the right and side we see the *shopping (shopping) centres and Business areas.”

“We also see the Post Office, *phamacies (pharmacies), surgeries, filling station and shoes repair services.”

“At my home area you will *fined (find) the clothes store and *beutiful (beautiful) clothes.”

“My home area it has *pharmancy (pharmacy) the place where you’ll find any kind of medicines.”

“Because you can’t *fine (find) the person that they *feight (fight) my *nearbas (neighbours) are the people who’s been peace in their live.”

School Z learners made the following errors:

“This place is *sorrounded (surrounded) with mountain.

“And here we have a *collage (college) it is called Tshiya if you want to become a teacher.”

“We don’t have a many *toll (tall) buildings.”

"An all the people *how (who) live at Qwaqwa he/she come to Phuthaditjhaba to buy because is a large area and it has a *imformation (information) where people found direction if they want ather place at Qwaqwa."

"They *rebeled (rebelled) against him and worship other gods like Ashilo."

"It has a many student *how (who) are *atend (attend) at that schools the pupils *how (who) came from other like Mabilela, Matsikeng, and other place because other place *scholls (schools) are not so many that is why they come to Phuthaditjhaba to learn because they want to learn like *ather (other) people *how (who) have education for the *furture (future)."

"The *interesing (interesting) thing in my home are many animals."

"Matsikeng was *beatiful (beautiful) place."

"When you arrive at Setsing *wich (which) is where your taxi will cast you you must ride the come through to Tebang."

"Jabulani Driving school is the school of *leaning (learning)."

"And we have a *hourses (houses) for kingdom from last year and you get that *hourses (houses) free."

"It is a very *beatifull (beautiful) and cool city."

"It has a many student *how (who) are atend at that schools the pupils *how (who) came from other like Mabilela, Matsikeng and other place because at other place the *scholls (schools) are not so many that is why they come to Phuthaditjhaba to learn because they want to learn like ather people *how (who) have a education for the *furture (future)."

4.7.2 *Semantic Errors*

The following errors of confusion of sense relations in which near-synonyms were used were recorded per group.

School X learners made the following errors:

“And this place has a small town called Setsing some of call it a town some of us call it Setsing because it do not *consist of (have) Shoprite and OK so they think is not a town without that.”

“The first thing your *meet (come across) when you arrive is factries.”

“I don’t no the *length (size) of that area I live in because is too big.”

“Next to Sebokeng is Phuthaditjhaba which is *on top of (beyond) Sebokeng.”

“Qwaqwa is a very beautiful area it *consist (has) mountain green once.

“This area is *wider [the] (biggest) [in] Free State in South Africa.”

“The schools are very *long of (far away from) my area, are very *distance (distant).”

School Y learners made the following errors:

“If you want to know where I live here is my *direct (address).”

“This school is next to Letsholo General Dealer. At that shop you must *jump (get off) and you’ll see the road.”

“When you get in information centre on the left hand side in Phuthaditjhaba area then you *pass with (continue in) a taxi straight in this thae road.”

“When you *see on (look to) the right left hand side you’ll see a school which is called Kgolathuto School. Then you will *take a corner on the left hand side (turn left at the corner) then you *take a corner again (turn left) again. You’ll *go up with (continue in)

a taxi. On the right hand side you'll see a public phones (Telkom) then you *slope down with (continue in) a taxi."

"You will *take (travel on) a High Way to Gauteng pass it."

"I think you will have to take a *restposition (you will have to rest) and you will at a beganing of village called Qwaqwa which reach to it you will see big or *long (tall) buildings they called or let me say is a University called Uniqwa."

"I think you will *take a curve at the left hand side (turn to the left)."

School Z learners made the following errors:

"When you arrive at Setsing wich is where your taxi will *cast (When you arrive at Setsing get off the taxi) you you must *ride (be on board) the come through Tebang (on those that come to Tebang)."

"There is another ground that the taxis *staying to it (There is a taxi rank/a site for taxis)."

"It has main road has *shared (divided/ runs in the middle) Phuthaditjhaba at the mattle."

4.8 Other Errors

The following errors occurred fewer than ten times in the 30 compositions that were randomly selected.

4.8.1 *The Use of "The" Instead of "There"*

In some instances learners used "the" where "there"(as in "there are lions in Kruger National Park") should have been used. For example:

"*The (there) are those who live in large and beautiful areas."

"At Sebokeng *the (there) are many grandmothers and grandfathers."

"Setsing it is very big *the (there) are shops that are to expensive."

"*The (there) are many villages at our area."

"In side the town we have so many entertainments*the (there) are the hotels, cinemas and *the (there) is the place on the way to Thaba Tseka called Molimo-Nthuse is a nice place about 53 km from Maseru."

4. 8. 2 *Wrong Inflection of Adjectives*

There were instances in which learners inflected adjectives wrongly for a non-existent plural form, such as in the following:

"They make the *schools uniforms (school uniforms)."

"The taxi driver he/she will ask you where then you slope down with a taxi on the right hand side you'll see a taxi rank a long *distances taxi (a long-distance taxi rank)."

The learners also had problems concerning the use of punctuation marks (either they used them wrongly or they did not use them at all), separating words (home land, witch craft), combining words (Freestate) and using capital letters in the middle of sentences.

4.9 Summary of Findings

The findings are summarized in the following tables. Percentages within error categories in these tables have been rounded to the nearest whole number. They may therefore not add up to 100%.

Table 5

A Comparison of Different Kinds of Errors Within School X, Ranked by Frequency

Frequency order	Error category	Percentage (n = 170)
1	Singular/plural Nouns	26%
2	Article	22%
3	Verb	21%
4	Pronoun	17%
5	Preposition	14%
Total		100%

Note: Percentages within categories have been rounded to the nearest whole number. They may therefore not add up to 100%. For raw data see Appendices G1, G2 and G3 sub-totals of each error category for School X.

As can be seen in the table above, the areas of difficulty for the learners of this group in descending order of frequency were the use of singular and plural forms, the use of the articles, the verbs, the use of the pronouns and the use of the prepositions.

Table 6

A Comparison of Different Kinds of Errors Within School Y, Ranked by Frequency

Frequency order	Error category	Percentage (n = 164)
1	Article	38%
2	Verb	20%
3	Preposition	15%
4	Pronoun	14%
5	Singular/plural Nouns	13%
Total		100%

Note: Percentages within categories have been rounded to the nearest whole number. They may therefore not add up to 100%. For raw data see Appendices G1, G2 and G3 sub-totals of each error category for School Y.

As can be seen in the table above, the areas of difficulty for the learners of this group in descending order of frequency were the use of the articles, the verbs, the use of the prepositions, the use of the pronouns and the use of singular and plural forms.

Table 7

A Comparison of Different Kinds of Errors Within School Z, Ranked by Frequency

Frequency order	Error category	Percentage (n = 236)
1	Article	30%
2	Verb	22%
3	Preposition	19%
4	Singular/plural Nouns	19%
5	Pronoun	11%
Total		100%

Note: Percentages within categories have been rounded to the nearest whole number. They may therefore not add up to 100%. For raw data see Appendices G1, G2 and G3 sub-totals of each error category for School Z.

As can be seen in the table above, the areas of difficulty for the learners of this group in descending order of frequency were the use of the articles, the verbs, the use of the prepositions, the use of singular and plural forms, and the use of the pronouns.

Table 8

Overall Percentages of the Three Groups on Error Categories, Ranked by Frequency

Frequency order	Error category	Percentage (n = 570)
1	Article	30%
2	Verb	21%
3	Singular/plural Nouns	20%
4	Preposition	16%
5	Pronoun	14%
Total		100%

Note: Percentages within categories have been rounded to the nearest whole number. They may therefore not add up to 100%. For raw data see Appendices G1, G2 and G3 grand totals of each error category divided by the major grand total.

As can be seen in the above table, the areas of difficult for the learners in descending order of frequency were the use of the articles, followed by the use of the verbs, then the use of singular and plural forms, followed by the use of the prepositions and the use of the pronouns.

Table 9

A Comparison of Overall Error Percentages of the Three Groups

Ranking	School	Percentage (n = 570)
1	School Z	41%
2	School X	30%
3	School Y	29%
Total		100%

Note: Percentages within categories have been rounded to the nearest whole number. They may therefore not add up to 100%. For raw data Appendix G3.

As can be seen from the table above, school Y (from the middle stratum) made relatively fewer errors than school X (from the top stratum), but school Z (from the bottom stratum) made relatively more errors than the other two schools.

Chapter Five

Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The major purpose of this study was to examine common errors made by learners and their sources. Overall it was found that learners made errors falling into two categories: grammatical and lexical.

This study has revealed many errors in the written English of learners in selected Phuthaditjhaba secondary schools. The major question that remains is “What is the source of these errors?” That is, are they interlingual or developmental in nature? Lightbown and Spada (1999, p. 165) argue that “the transfer of patterns from the native language is one of the major sources of errors in learner language.” They also argue that there are many errors made by learners when they try to internalize the rules of the target language, which are referred to as developmental (errors which might very well be made by children acquiring their first language). These errors are sometimes referred to as overgeneralization (errors caused by trying to use a rule in a context where it does not belong), and simplification (where elements of a sentence are left out, or where all verbs have the same form regardless of person, number, or tense) (Lightbown & Spada, 1993, p. 56).

5.2 Discussion

The three hypotheses for this study were (1) learners will make errors in the areas of syntax and lexis when they write in English, (2) one source of learners’ errors will be their

developing knowledge of the language (developmental or intralingual errors) and (3) one source of learners' errors will be the interference from their L1 (interference errors). The findings clearly supported the three hypotheses.

The first hypothesis, that learners will make errors in the areas of syntax and lexis when they write in English, was fully supported by the broad categories and frequency of learners' errors.

The second hypothesis, that one source of learners' errors will be their developing knowledge of the language (developmental errors), was supported by the findings on redundant verbs, wrong choice of prepositions, wrong verb choice, redundant articles, wrong article choice, the use of the plural noun form instead of the singular noun form, missing pronouns, wrong pronoun choice, lexical errors of spelling, semantic errors of lexis, wrong inflection of the past tense, subject-verb concord/agreement and wrong inflection of the plural form.

The third hypothesis, that one source of learners' errors will be the interference from their L1 (interference errors), was supported by the findings on missing verbs, redundant verbs, missing articles, missing prepositions, redundant prepositions, the use of the singular noun form instead of the plural noun form, redundant pronouns and lexical errors of spelling.

Verb tense errors may be a result of the fact that the learners seem not to have been sure about the tense that they must use in the given composition task. For example:

"At my home area we *had (have) stores and many things."

Wrong inflections of the past tense of verbs seem to be developmental errors. The learners might have been taught that verbs take on different forms when they change to the

past tense. The learners might have learnt and or been drilled in the long list of the forms of verbs in the present and past tenses. In an attempt to apply this rule, the learners might be going straight to the verbs in the sentences and changing them to the past tense irrespective of what precedes them and the context in which they are used. It appears that learners have learnt the correct past tense form of the verbs because they are even able to write the correct form of irregular verbs e.g. see-saw.

Subject-verb concord errors could be a developmental error resulting from learners' simplification, by using the base form of the verb. For example:

"The area *have (has) the rivers and other shops."

Missing verbs may be a result of the fact that auxiliary verbs are not used in Sesotho or they may be a result of an absence of a verb "to be" in Sesotho. In Sesotho 'subject concords' are used in the place of auxiliary verbs (Guma, 1971, p. 161; Doke and Mofokeng, 1985, pp. 392-397). For example:

"The child *is (auxiliary verb) asleep."

"Ngwana *o (subject concord) robetse."

"The children *are (auxiliary verb) asleep."

"Bana *ba (subject concord) robetse."

Wrong verb choice seems to be a result of the fact that learners are not yet fully competent in their English vocabulary. They may also not be sure about the spelling of some of the words. This may result from the fact that learners in the study lacked contact with English outside the classroom. It seemed that they spoke English in a limited range of circumstances, and communicated in their mother tongue.

Redundant verbs seem to be an interference error from Sesotho or overlearning. The learners seem to have made literal translations from Sesotho in which a subject concord is used. For example:

“People *are (omit) believe the streetkids are they not to catch some other place.”
↓ ↓ ↓
“Batho *ba (subject concord) kgolwa...”

Missing articles seem to have been caused by mother tongue interference. In Sesotho there are no articles. For example:

“A cow lives in a kraal.”
↓ ↓ ↓ ↓
“Kgomo e dula ka sakeng.”
“The cow is in the kraal.”
↓ ↓ ↓ ↓
“Kgomo e ka sakeng.”

Redundant articles and wrong article choice seem to be developmental errors. The learners are not very conversant with the use of articles. As a result they used them indiscriminately.

Missing prepositions may be a result of mother tongue interference. The learners seem to have made literal translations from Sesotho. For example:

“I am live Randfontein.”
↓ ↓ ↓ ↓
“Nna ke dula Randfontein.”

There is also some likelihood that learners might have resorted to “error avoidance” techniques to cover up for their uncertainty about the correct prepositions to be used.

Redundant prepositions seem to be a result of mother tongue interference. The learners seem to have translated literally from Sesotho, in which “ho” is an infinitive and “teng” is an adverb of place. For example:

“ *behind* **to* Dinare secondary school.”
 “ *kamorao* *ho* Dinare Secondary School.”
 “... is the area *where* Jesus was born **at*.”
 “... ke tulo *moo* Jesu a hlahetseng *teng*.”

The use of the singular noun form for the plural noun form may be a result of mother tongue interference. Plural form in Sesotho is inflected as a prefix (Guma, 1971, pp. 41-61; Doke and Mofokeng, 1985, pp. 57-84), whereas in English it is inflected as a suffix (see Table 10).

Table 10

Examples of Pluralization in Sesotho and English

Sesotho		English	
Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Motho	<u>B</u> atho	Person	Persons _s
Motse	<u>M</u> etse	Village	Villages _s
Lesiba	<u>M</u> asiba	Feather	Feathers _s
Sefate	<u>D</u> ifate	Tree	Trees _s
Ntja	<u>D</u> intja	Dog	Dogs _s
Borokgo	<u>M</u> arokgo	Bridge	Bridges _s
Kgomo	<u>D</u> ikgomo	Cow	Cows _s

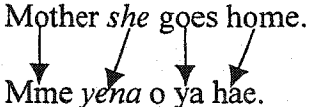
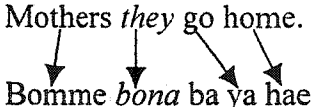
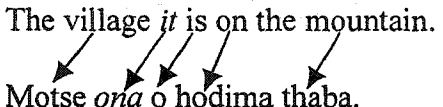
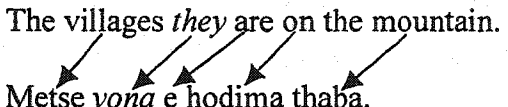
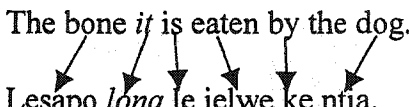
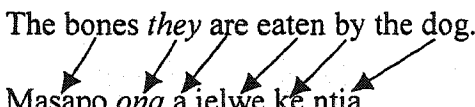
The use of the plural noun form instead of the singular noun form may be a developmental error which learners make when they have learnt that in English the plural form of some words is formed by adding an "s" to the word. The learners might have generalized the rule to all words irrespective of the number involved.

The problem of missing pronouns may be a developmental error which was made when the learners tried to apply the target language rule that a noun and its pronoun are not used immediately after each other. Maybe because they had not attained its mastery, they left pronouns out even where they were needed.

The use of redundant pronouns may be a result of the influence of Sesotho. In Sesotho it is correct to use the noun and the pronoun in the same sentence, that is, a pronoun may be used in apposition to a noun to show emphasis (Guma, 1971, p. 93; Doke and Mofokeng, 1985, p. 108). (see Table 11).

Table 11

Sesotho Noun-Pronoun Apposition Usage for Emphasis

Sesotho and English (literal translation)	English (correct version)
Mother <i>she</i> goes home.  Mme <i>yena</i> o ya hae.	Mother goes home.
Mothers <i>they</i> go home.  Bomme <i>bona</i> ba ya hae.	Mothers go home.
The village <i>it</i> is on the mountain.  Motse <i>ona</i> o hodima thaba.	The village is on the mountain.
The villages <i>they</i> are on the mountain.  Metse <i>yona</i> e hodima thaba.	The villages are on the mountain.
The bone <i>it</i> is eaten by the dog.  Lesapo <i>lona</i> le jelwe ke ntja.	The bone is eaten by the dog.
The bones <i>they</i> are eaten by the dog.  Masapo <i>ona</i> a jelwe ke ntja.	The bones are eaten by the dog.

The problem of wrong pronoun choice may be a developmental problem resulting from the fact that learners are not yet perfect in their use of pronouns in English.

Lexical errors of wrong spellings might be a result of mother tongue interference. In Sesotho many words are spelt in the same way as they are pronounced. Pronunciation suggests spelling in Sesotho, which is often not the case with English. This might have resulted in learners spelling English words as they pronounce them. For example:

“Bakaries” (bakeries)

“Shrabs” (shrubs)

“Safaring” (suffering)

“Thaed road” (tarred road)

“Bucharies” (butcheries)

“Garash” (garage)

“Grable road” (gravel road)

On the other hand there is a likelihood of lexical errors being a result of developmental problems. The learners might have not heard the pronunciation of words correctly. For example:

“Right and side” (right hand side)

“Leftern side” (left hand side)

“Left and side” (left hand side)

“Are long” (along)

“Rightern side” (right hand side)

There is also a likelihood of lexical errors being developmental errors that might have resulted from irregularities in the rules of English spelling. For example:

“Universitys” (universities)

“Goates” (goats)

“Thiefs” (thieves)

The other possibility is that similar pronunciation (homophones) has produced some developmental errors. For example:

“Hollydays” (holidays)

“No” (know)

“Hear” (here)

“were” (where)

“True” (through)

“Causes” (courses)

“leave” (live)

“Dose” (those)

“Fill” excited (feel)

“Sum” of the girls (some)

Most of these misspellings are surely the result of very low literacy levels, combined with faulty pronunciation. Most of the spelling errors suggest that learners spell from auditory (incorrect) memory instead of visual memory (from reading). James (1998, p. 137) identifies misspelling errors that are triggered by mispronunciation, which he asserts are “committed long before the pen meets the paper and are a result of the mispronunciation of the English second language target sound.”

Semantic errors in lexis could have resulted from poor vocabulary. Learners seemed to have not fully understood the meanings of some words and the appropriate context in which they are used.

The use of “the” instead of “there” is probably a developmental or misspelling error that might have resulted from not hearing the correct pronunciation of the word “there.” When this word is pronounced by L2 speakers the final consonant /r/ is silent, thus the learners may hear “the-.” It may also suggest that the learners might have not seen the written form of this word very often; they might have heard it mostly in speech.

The wrong inflection of the plural form may be a developmental error caused by learners trying to apply the rule of forming the plural by adding an “s” to the nouns. The learners might have added an “s” indiscriminately to the nouns.

With regard to spelling errors, it was noted that there was an anomaly in the error density of Schools Y and X: School Y from the middle stratum performed better than School X from the top stratum.

Some of the findings of this study are similar to those identified in the taxonomy of Politzer and A. Ramirez (as cited in Dulay et al., 1982). Similarities were found in the following categories:

- ◆ Regularizing the rule, e.g. “*Sheeps” for “sheep.”
- ◆ Substitution of plurals for singulars, e.g. “Lesotho is a small country with ten districts, and each *districts (district) has own town like Maseru, Mafeteng, Quthing ...”
- ◆ Substitution of singulars for plurals, e.g. “The most people are talk Zulu and other *language (languages).”
- ◆ Omission of prepositions, e.g. “I leave nearest *the shopping centre (nearest to the shopping centre).”
- ◆ Misuse of prepositions, e.g. “Must go *with (to) the right hand side from Setsing ...”
- ◆ Subject pronoun used as a redundant element, e.g. “Qwaqwa *it (omit) has many thing like towns, villages.”
- ◆ Omission of the “dummy” pronoun it, e.g. “I live in Bluegumbosch and *is found (it is found) around Qwaqwa.”
- ◆ Omission of the article, e.g. “Here I describe *area (the area) where I live.”
- ◆ Disagreement of subject and verb in number, e.g. “The area *have (has) the rivers and other shops.”
- ◆ Attachment of the past marker to the infinitive verb, e.g. “The many people like to *visited (to visit) Phuthaditjhaba at the weekends but all most when it is a hollydays because it has a many places to rest like Qwaqwa hotel or Phuthaditjhaba hall.”

- ◆ Alternating use of pronoun number, e.g. “It is the a small area from *their (its) neighbouring towns.”
- ◆ Omission of the verb “be”, e.g. “The first *found (are found) in factries and the second in Fairways.”
- ◆ Omission of the main verb, e.g. “Because this area always *people (allows) to return to the area of the home.”
- ◆ Regularization of the irregular past tense by adding -ed, e.g. “My father *goed (went) to town yesterday.”
- ◆ Omission of -ed in simple past tense, e.g. “They rebeled against him and *worship (worshipped) other gods like Ashilo.”

5.3 Conclusions

This thesis was a response to the observation that secondary school learners’ poor written English renders their writing incoherent.

On the basis of the findings outlined in the earlier part of this chapter the following conclusions have been drawn.

Learners who are mother-tongue speakers of Sesotho seem to be disadvantaged by teaching and learning through the medium of ESL, with which they lack sufficient contact. Such learners seem to be exposed directly to ESL only in the classroom. This creates serious problems of transition from their L1 to ESL.

Errors that seemed to have resulted from mother-tongue interference showed that learners might have first thought in their mother tongue and then translated into English. Some sentences were purely Sesotho sentences, in terms of structure, with English words.

It would appear from the errors in the compositions that the writing skill is probably receiving too little attention in the teaching and learning of ESL. This is certainly one explanation for the fact that learners who are in grade 11, who have been taught many subjects for many years through ESL, are still making errors that render their writing difficult to understand.

Semantic errors in lexis seem to have greater obstructive value than grammatical errors in impeding communication, and thus in deciding whether a learner is good or bad at English, i.e. a few lexical errors in a paragraph may render it incoherent while many grammatical errors may merely irritate the reader. This implies that errors differ in their impact on communication. This is supported by James (1998, p. 144) when he asserts that “native speakers consider lexical errors in learners’ IL to be more disruptive and irritating than other types.” This also implies that learners who make more semantic errors in lexis may obtain lower marks than those who make more grammatical errors.

Learners made many spelling errors which seem to arise from auditory misperception. This implies that learners do very little reading and/or they have a poor visual image of the words.

Learners from the same class made similar errors, for example: wrong use of the word “slope” and “steep”. This suggests that this may be an induced error either from teaching or from the same textbook.

It became clear in the marking of the compositions that though learners made a wide range of errors which rendered their writing difficult to understand, those errors were not signs of intellectual problems. Learners seemed to have information and knowledge about the content of the composition given, but failed to express themselves coherently and correctly. This suggests that the medium of instruction is a factor in determining the academic success of learners. It is possible that the learners could be awarded very low marks in examinations on the basis of their incoherent writing.

5.4 Limitations

The survey was done only on Sesotho-speaking learners drawn from within one area, Phuthaditjhaba. Therefore, the study cannot be generalized to the speakers of other languages, or even all varieties of Sesotho. Furthermore, the subjects were all from grade 11, and it is possible that different error profiles might emerge from younger or older learners, or from learners at different academic levels.

It could not be generalised that the class that had fewer errors would perform better in the final examinations than the class that made many errors, because a descriptive composition task might not be an appropriate measure of the relationship between performance in ESL and performance in other subjects of the science stream, such as Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Geography, where other measurement instruments may be used, and where a knowledge of the technical terms and symbols particular to each discipline is needed.

It was not possible to differentiate between errors and mistakes. There is a great probability that some of the deviations from grammar were mistakes, not errors, but in this study they have been treated as errors, more so because writers are expected to revise and edit, which should reduce 'mistakes' to a minimum.

It was not possible to use such research techniques as think-aloud protocols, where subjects articulate what processes they are using to generate sentences. Subjects could not be interviewed to find out the causes of errors. The researcher had to rely on guesswork based on the errors that were found. There is a probability that some guesses were wrong.

It was impossible to identify definitive, single sources of errors. Possible sources of some errors are ambiguous.

It was difficult to conclude that all learners who committed many errors were equally poor in the use of English, and that all those who committed few errors were equally proficient in English, because some learners resort to error-avoidance techniques.

The manner in which the analysis of compositions for errors was carried out might have led to many errors being missed because of the shortness of many compositions. The analysis of compositions for errors was done only on the first 200 words of each one. It is arguable that learners make many errors in the second half of their compositions when they rush to finish.

The data collected were synchronic, rather than diachronic. It was therefore not possible to decide whether or not the errors identified were systematic ("fossilized"), or whether they were transient.

5.5 General Recommendations

The recommendation to all educational officials, teachers and institutions dealing with teaching and learning is that they must unite in an endeavour to prevent and remedy poor ESL skills. There should be some consistency in the teaching and evaluation of writing based on accepted principles. It is possible that there will be some progress when all teachers “pull and push” in the same directions. The process of teaching ESL at various grade levels should have one goal in mind: to help learners acquire ESL listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. The assessment of learners’ progress should not be delayed until grade 12; there should be standards set down at each level which learners should satisfy before they progress to the next grade level or next phase of education. For example, at the end of each phase (phase I [grade 3], phase 2 [grade 6], phase 3 [grade 9] and phase 4 [grade 12]), there should be common ESL standards that all learners must satisfy. This could be of great help in preventing learners’ difficulties with ESL or remedying them before errors become fossilized. Correctness and appropriateness should be emphasised at all levels of written English namely: letter level, word level, sentence level, and text/discourse level.

5.5.1 Recommendations to Teachers of ESL

Teachers should expose learners to as much English as possible. Learners should be made to read widely in class and at home. Reading remains the main source of academic information. It is reading that will help learners to have a visual image of the target language and provide models for coherent and cohesive writing (Krashen, 1984). Learners should be encouraged to listen, speak and write as often as they can. They should speak it with their

friends and teachers both at school and outside it, and be exposed to English language media wherever these are available and accessible.

Teachers should aim at improving learners' confidence in using English by their teaching, feedback and by making learners aware that in ESL learning they will make some errors and mistakes but that should not discourage them from using it. Teachers should attempt to create a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to ESL acquisition. However, teachers should be careful not to monopolize interaction in the classroom so much that learners are deprived of opportunities to use English themselves.

Learners should be encouraged to write discourse that they hear and read. The more learners write sentences and paragraphs, the more they are likely to internalize spelling and sentence structures that are appropriate. This will help learners to interact directly with the language that they are learning and pick up many of the language forms unconsciously.

Learners should be helped to learn the meanings and spelling of words in context, as many language elements are context bound. Learning in this way will eliminate problems such as words with similar pronunciations but different spelling. For example: the following groups of words are pronounced in the same or similar ways but the context in which they are used will definitely indicate which one is appropriate:

'nose' and 'knows'

'coercion' and 'cohesion'

'live', 'leaf' and 'leave'

'lies' and 'lice'

'here' and 'hear'

While it is good to use the communicative approach to increase fluency, learners should still be taught the basic rules of grammar to improve accuracy. Errors should be corrected to avoid fossilization. There is a great danger in not correcting errors with the hope that they will automatically fade away. There is a greater likelihood that leaving them uncorrected will serve the purpose of reinforcing them in the minds of learners. However, the manner in which errors are corrected should be well-planned to avoid discouraging the learners. Errors should not only be corrected by making learners aware of them but there should be some focus-on-form exercises to help learners internalize the appropriate ESL forms. Teachers should note common errors down and these should be given special attention, with a period set aside for the correction of such errors. Where possible, computer programmes and games that assist with the teaching and learning of English should be acquired and used.

5.5.2 Recommendations to Teachers of Subjects Taught Through English as a Second Language

Teachers of other subjects that are taught through ESL should bear in mind that they are also teachers of English and should always see themselves in that way. They should mark not only the content but also mark errors in their learners' language errors. In some cases they may even make lists of ESL errors and discuss them with teachers of ESL so that they may follow the same error-correction procedures.

These teachers should always note that learning ESL through learning the subject matter of History, Geography, Physical Science, Mathematics, Agricultural Science, Biblical Studies, Accounting, Economics, Business Economics, Home Economics, etc., is one of the

best ways of learning English because the language is guaranteed to be rich and meaningful. It follows logically that teachers of other subjects should strive to ensure that what is listened to in their classes is fully understood by the learners. Teachers may accomplish this by using simplified language, motivating the learners, relating the subject matter to local realities, using controlled and well-directed pair and small-group activities and by engaging and maintaining the learners' attention. They should always teach in English and explain some of the words and expressions in context. This should help learners to learn new vocabulary, idiomatic expressions and sentence structures.

5.6 Recommendations to Teacher-Training Institutions

Teacher-training institutions should regard every teacher as a language teacher, and particularly a teacher of English as a second language because no subject can be taught without the use of a language. Prospective teachers should be shown the need to use English with their learners all the time. The trainees should undergo a full course, theoretical and practical, on both first and second language acquisition. All student-teachers should undergo compulsory immersion programs in ESL at all teacher-training institutions.

Moreover, reasonably high standards of ESL proficiency should be set, in writing, speaking, reading and listening, and all prospective teachers should meet such standards before they graduate. Teacher-training institutions should strive to produce teachers who are not only fluent in English but who can also teach it in a way that makes it enjoyable to learners. Prospective teachers should be thoroughly trained in the marking and correction of errors and in how to give feedback to learners. Above all, teacher-training institutions should

endeavour to eradicate the difficulties that prospective teachers have with the use of English, by giving pre-service language courses. Teacher-training institutions should seek new and innovative methods of improving learners' fluency and writing accuracy in English.

5.7 Recommendations for Further Research

The present study and that of Msimanga (1999) found that local learners make errors in the categories of the lexicon, tenses, articles and prepositions. It is therefore recommended that further research in the area of error analysis should focus on why learners within Phuthaditjhaba, in particular, and other areas seem to have difficulty in these categories.

The present study focussed on groups of learners. It is recommended that further research should focus on individual learners taught by the same or different teachers. For example, each learner's errors should be analysed and compared with those of other learners in the same class, or in another class at the same school or at a different school. This may help to reveal reasons that lead to different levels of mastery of ESL by learners in the same class or same grade at the same school or different schools.

It is recommended that other researchers should explore common ESL errors made by learners who are mother-tongue speakers of the other eight African ancestral languages of South Africa, namely: isiNdebele, isiZulu, isiXhosa, siSwati, Xitsonga, Tshivenda, Sepedi and Setswana. This may help language researchers and teachers to discover whether errors that were thought to be developmental in this study are indeed developmental, or are due to L1 interference.

More work on the deviations from standard grammatical usage should be done in order to decide whether a deviation is a mistake or an error. Learners should be given a chance to revise and edit their own pieces of writing in order to reduce mistakes to a minimum. This may help teaching to focus on the systematic errors of the learners.

It is recommended that further research should focus on error correction methods in order to see which of them are effective in L2 learning. It is also recommended that further research should focus on the effects of corrections made by teachers compared to those made by other learners (peer correction) or by the learners who made the errors (self-corrections).

It is recommended that research on the examination and evaluation of teaching strategies be conducted in order to identify solutions that can be applied in the classroom by teachers to avoid, prevent or correct errors.

Research techniques such as think-aloud protocols should be used to elicit insights into the errors investigated, and thus to resolve some of the difficulties of identifying the sources of errors.

It is recommended that whole compositions be analyzed for errors in order to discover whether learners more many errors in the first half or in the second half of their compositions.

When analysing the compositions, it was the impression of the researcher that lexical errors interfered with reader comprehension, or even prevented comprehension from taking place more seriously than grammatical errors. It is recommended that research be conducted into the impact of the two major categories of written errors identified in this research: syntactic and lexical.

5.8 Conclusion

The results of the present study showed that both grammatical and lexical errors have major impacts on local ESL learners' writing. It appeared that the sources of most of the errors were the natural linguistic and semantic development of the learners' language, and interference from the learners' L1 (Sesotho). In addition to these two principal sources, it seemed that some errors were induced by the result of faulty teaching. These findings represent a significant contribution to the existing literature on error analysis in the field of learning English as a second language in the Republic of South Africa.

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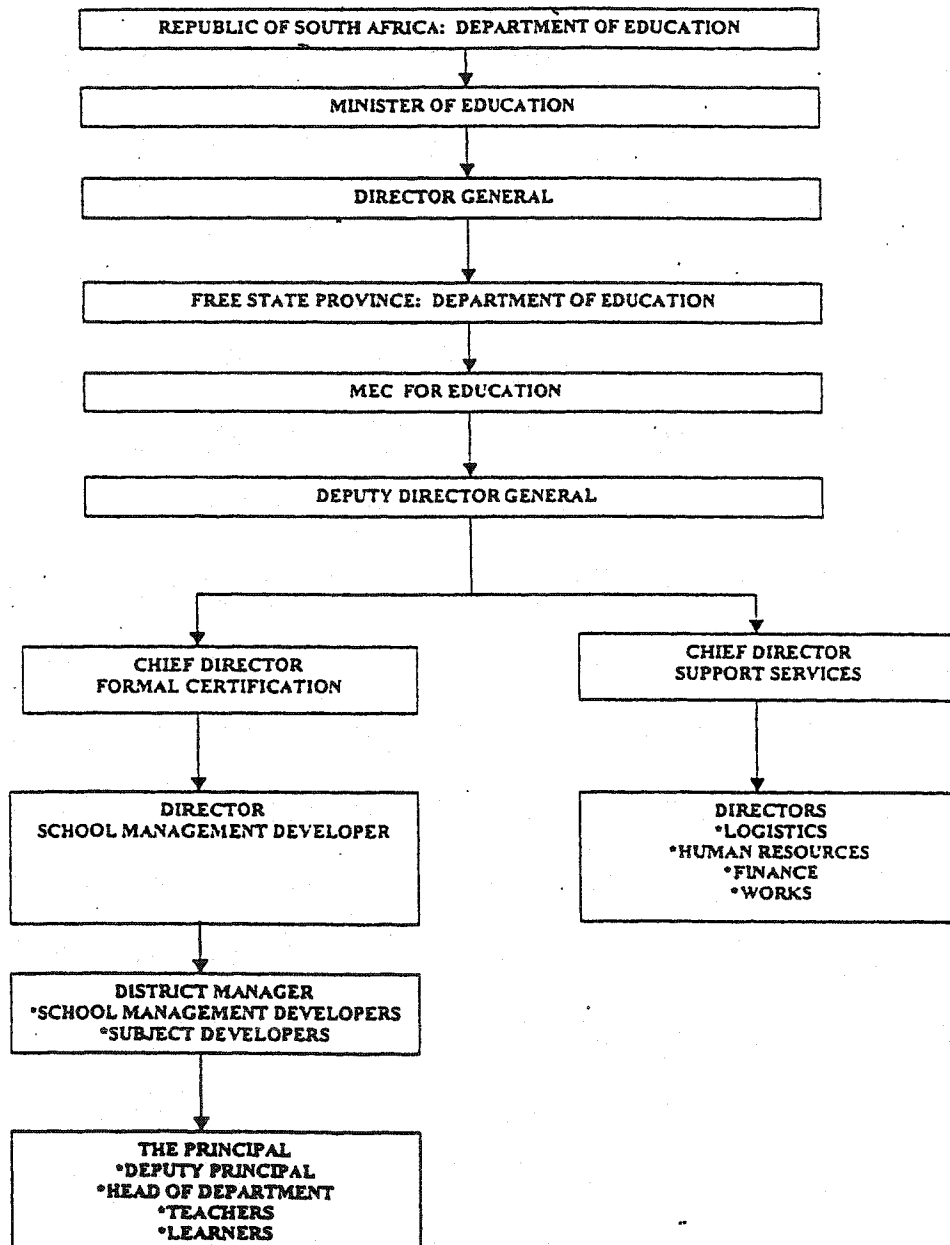
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Appendices

Appendix A

Structure of Educational Administration in the Free State Province



Adapted from the Free State Education Department Organogram provided by the Human Resources Directorate on 13 December 1999.

Appendix B

Letter From the Department of Education, Free State Province.



FREE STATE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

Education

Private Bag X20565 • Bloemfontein • 9300 • South Africa
55 Elizabeth Street • CR Swart Building • Bloemfontein
Tel. : +27 (0) 51 - 4074911 • Fax : +27 (0) 51 - 4074036

Enquiries : Mr W.B. van Rooyen/LB
Reference no. : 0.1/11/3/3

Tel. : 051-405 5504
Fax : 051-407 4032

22 September 1999

Mr T I Makume
Director (South Africa): Uniqwa / Concordia Project
University of the North
Qwa Qwa Campus
Private Bag X 13
PHUTHADITJHABA
9866

OFFICE: ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATION

RECEIVED

SEP 30 1999

DATE

Dear Mr Makume

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

1. Your request dated 2 September 1999 and the detailed research requests for five students refer.
2. Research titles applied for:

Name:

Ms Tankiso Mokoena:

Mr Moroke Zacharia Sematle:

Mr Paul Mofokeng:

Mr Noa Komako

Me Mamokhele Julia Mami Maduna

Titles:

Strategies for preventing the sexual abuse of children in schools.

An analysis of common errors in the written English of black learners in secondary schools in Phuthaditjhaba District of the North-eastern Free State.

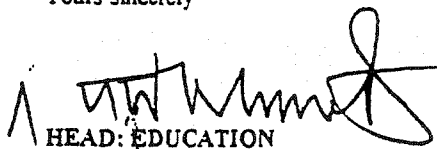
School based INSET as one tool (change) to improve teachers' and learners' performance in schools through normalising collegiality among teachers.

Support systems in the learning and teaching of mathematics.

Supporting curriculum change in the classroom:
An analysis of the impact of the use of teaching aids in mathematics teaching and learning in Qwa Qwa primary schools.

3. Permission is granted for the above students to conduct research in the Free State Department of Education under the following conditions:
- 3.1 The names of teachers/learners (where applicable) must be provided by the principals.
 - 3.2 Officials / Principals / HOD's / Teachers / Learners (where applicable) participate voluntarily in the projects.
 - 3.3 Where applicable, the names of schools and respondents involved remain confidential in all respects.
 - 3.4 Completion of questionnaires by teaching staff and learners must take place outside normal tuition time of the school.
 - 3.5 This letter must be shown to all participating persons.
 - 3.6 Individual reports on the 5 projects must be donated to the Free State Department of Education after completion of the projects where it will be accessed in the Education Library, Bloemfontein.
 - 3.7 You must address a letter to the Head: Education, for attention
W.B. van Rooyen
Room 1211
C.R. Swart Building
Private Bag X20565
BLOEMFONTEIN
9301
accepting the conditions as laid down.
4. We wish the students every success with their research.

Yours sincerely


HEAD: EDUCATION

Appendix C

Letter Asking for Permission From the District Manager, School Management Developer and School Principal

Date _____

Name and address

Dear Sir/Madam

I am currently completing my master's thesis in education. I am collecting data that will help to improve the teaching of English in South African Black schools, especially in northeastern Free State. I request permission to conduct my research at _____ school. The data collection process will consist in asking grade 11 learners of _____ stream to write a composition on a particular topic. All information will be used for research purposes only. No individual or school will be identified, and all information will be kept strictly confidential.

Thank you for your cooperation and assistance.

Yours faithfully,

M. Sematle
Graduate Student

Appendix D

Letter Asking for Permission From the Participating Teachers of English

Date _____

Name and address

Dear Sir/Madam

I am currently completing my master's thesis in education. I am collecting data that will help to improve the teaching of English in South African Black schools, especially in the northeastern Free State. I request permission to conduct my research in _____ class. The data collection process will consist in asking grade 11 learners of _____ stream to write a composition on a particular topic. All information will be used for research purposes only. No individual or school will be identified, and all information provided will be kept strictly confidential.

Thank you for your cooperation and assistance.

Yours faithfully,

M. Sematle
Graduate Student

Appendix E

Consent Form for the Learners

Dear Learner

I am currently completing my master's thesis in education. I am collecting data that will help to improve the teaching of English in South African Black schools especially in the northeastern Free State. I am requesting that you participate in my research. The data collection process will consist of asking you to write a composition on a particular topic. All information will be used for research purposes only. No individual or school will be identified, and all information provided will be kept strictly confidential.

You are completely free to participate or not participate in this research. If you are willing to participate, please sign your name in one of the spaces below, and remain in class for the composition activity.

- | | | |
|----|-----|-----|
| 1. | 8. | 15. |
| 2. | 9. | 16. |
| 3. | 10. | 17. |
| 4. | 11. | 18. |
| 5. | 12. | 19. |
| 6. | 13. | 20. |
| 7. | 14. | 21. |

Thanking you for your cooperation.

M. Sematle (Graduate Student)

Appendix F

Protocol for the Administration of the Instrument

A. Guidelines and protocol

1. This composition is not meant to expose you but to see how well you can produce a written piece of work on your own in English.
2. Please read the instructions carefully before you start writing.
3. Make sure that you understand the topic.
4. Ask where you do not understand.

B. Instructions

1. Read the topic below and make sure you understand it.
2. Take 20 minutes to scribble the facts you will write about this topic on the sheet provided (rough work).
3. The length of your composition must not exceed two pages.
4. You have one hour to write this composition.
5. Do not submit the sheet labelled rough work.

C. The composition topic: *A Detailed Description of My Home Area*

You have two pen friends in Pretoria. They have asked you to describe the region where you live (your home area). Give as many details as possible in order to supply your pen friends with a clear description.

Appendix G1

Summary of Verb and Article Errors

No	Script	Tense	1 Verb			Sub total	2 Article			Subtotal
			Missing	Wrong choice	Redundant		Missing	Redundant	Wrong choice	
1	X05	2	2	4	4	12	4	7	0	11
2	X07	0	2	1	0	3	3	0	0	3
3	X09	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
4	X11	1	0	0	1	2	1	2	1	4
5	X14	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
6	X23	0	1	1	0	2	2	1	0	3
7	X25	0	1	1	0	2	3	0	0	3
8	X31	0	2	1	0	3	1	1	3	5
9	X36	4	3	1	3	11	1	1	1	3
10	X38	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	2
Subtotal		7	11	10	8	36	17	15	5	37
11	Y04	0	3	4	0	7	6	0	1	7
12	Y07	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	1	5
13	Y11	4	0	0	0	4	2	2	1	5
14	Y17	2	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	2
15	Y23	0	4	0	0	4	1	0	6	7
16	Y25	3	1	3	1	8	3	0	0	3
17	Y26	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	10	11
18	Y28	2	0	1	1	4	4	1	6	11
19	Y31	0	0	1	0	1	3	0	1	4
20	Y33	0	3	0	0	3	0	6	1	7
Subtotal		11	11	9	2	33	22	13	27	62
21	Z01	1	2	0	1	4	1	11	3	15
22	Z06	1	3	1	0	5	6	1	1	8
23	Z08	2	2	2	2	8	8	2	0	10
24	Z10	5	1	0	0	6	1	0	0	1
25	Z24	2	3	1	1	7	2	3	3	8
26	Z27	0	0	1	1	2	2	1	3	6
27	Z31	1	0	2	2	5	0	1	5	6
28	Z32	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	2	2
29	Z37	4	2	1	1	8	4	5	0	9
30	Z40	3	0	1	0	4	3	1	1	5
Subtotal		20	13	9	9	51	27	25	18	70
Grand Total		38	35	28	19	120	66	53	50	169

Appendix G2

Summary of Preposition Errors

3 Preposition					
No	Script	Missing	Wrong choice	Redundant	Subtotal
1	X05	2	0	2	4
2	X07	0	0	1	1
3	X09	0	1	0	1
4	X11	0	1	0	1
5	X14	3	1	1	5
6	X23	0	0	0	0
7	X25	2	0	2	4
8	X31	0	0	2	2
9	X36	0	2	1	3
10	X38	1	1	1	3
Subtotal		8	6	10	24
11	Y04	0	0	3	3
12	Y07	0	0	0	0
13	Y11	0	0	0	0
14	Y17	0	0	0	0
15	Y23	1	1	0	2
16	Y25	0	1	3	4
17	Y26	1	0	6	7
18	Y28	1	4	1	6
19	Y31	0	0	1	1
20	Y33	1	0	0	1
Subtotal		4	6	14	24
21	Z01	1	1	3	5
22	Z06	7	0	1	8
23	Z08	3	1	4	8
24	Z10	0	0	1	1
25	Z24	2	1	0	3
26	Z27	1	0	1	2
27	Z31	0	2	3	5
28	Z32	0	0	1	1
29	Z37	1	1	2	4
30	Z40	0	0	7	7
Subtotal		15	6	23	44
Grand Total		27	18	47	92

Appendix G3

Summary of Singular/Plural Noun Errors and Pronoun Errors

4 Singular/Plural Nouns					5 Pronoun				
No	Script	Singular for plural	Plural for singular	Subtotal	Missing	Redundant	Wrong choice	Subtotal	Grand Total
1	X05	4	2	6	1	1	0	2	35
2	X07	4	2	6	2	3	0	5	18
3	X09	6	0	6	0	0	0	0	8
4	X11	3	1	4	4	2	0	6	17
5	X14	3	1	4	3	0	1	4	15
6	X23	4	2	6	3	0	1	4	15
7	X25	8	0	8	1	0	0	1	18
8	X31	2	0	2	3	0	2	5	17
9	X36	1	0	1	2	0	0	2	20
10	X38	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	7
Subtotal		36	8	44	19	6	4	29	170
11	Y04	3	0	3	0	1	0	1	21
12	Y07	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
13	Y11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
14	Y17	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	5
15	Y23	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13
16	Y25	8	0	8	2	1	0	3	26
17	Y26	1	0	1	0	2	0	2	21
18	Y28	0	0	0	3	2	1	6	27
19	Y31	2	0	2	0	5	0	5	13
20	Y33	7	1	8	2	2	1	5	24
Subtotal		21	1	22	8	13	2	23	164
21	Z01	5	0	5	3	3	0	6	35
22	Z06	4	1	5	3	0	0	3	29
23	Z08	2	0	2	1	0	0	1	29
24	Z10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
25	Z24	4	1	5	1	1	1	3	26
26	Z27	0	0	0	1	3	0	4	14
27	Z31	2	0	2	0	2	0	2	20
28	Z32	1	0	1	0	2	0	2	8
29	Z37	9	0	9	0	1	0	1	31
30	Z40	15	1	16	0	3	1	4	36
Subtotal		42	3	45	9	15	2	26	236
Grand Total		99	12	111	36	34	8	78	570

Note: The vertical grand totals are for all the items from Appendix G1 to Appendix G3.