

INTERFERENCE OF MOTHER TONGUE IN LEARNING ENGLISH AMONG RURAL TAMIL STUDENTS IN SELECTED ENGINEERING COLLEGES IN COIMBATORE DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

This study is designed to analyse the 'Interference' effect of mother tongue (L1) grammatical rules in the learning English (L2) with the specific reference to the interference of mother tongue of Tamil learners in learning English. This article seeks to find out the grammatical components of (L1) grammar rules that the students of selected Engineering colleges in Coimbatore district use interchangeably in their daily writing of English (L2) Language. The subject of the empirical study comprises one hundred both Male and Female students of Tamil speaking rural students who are pursuing Engineering courses in different Engineering colleges in Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu, India. This research was undertaken with research questions were raised and analysed with help of brief survey. The statistical data were collected throughout the research and the findings were proved as the final result. Based on the results of the present study it could be concluded that among the various factors involved in the hindrance of English language learning, mother tongue interference is the main factor for the students' poor performance in English learning.

KEYWORDS: Empirical Study, Components, Interchangeably, Interference, Statistical Data

INTRODUCTION

As a second language in India, English serves as the **lingua franca**. It is the sole official language of some two dozen nation and shares official status in around twenty others (International encyclopedia.vol.IV). English is taught in all primary and secondary schools in keeping with its status as a second language in the country. The teaching of English is to enable the learners to pursue higher education as well as use English in everyday work situations. English is the language of Information Technology (IT) as well as the language establishing international relations in a borderless world. In order to enable our learners to establish network with students in other parts of the country and abroad through Internet and other electronic media, their proficiency in the English language is need to be given more important. Such proficiency will also help learners to read and listen to academics, professionals and recreational materials and to speak in seminars and conferences. The English curriculum for primary schools is designed to provide learners with a strong foundation in the English language. In learning the English language, learners are taught the fundamentals of English grammar and how to use it correctly both in speech and in writings. Learners are also taught the English sound system to enable them to pronounce words correctly and to speak fluently with correct stress and intonation so that these steps in early stages enhance them to speak internationally intelligible English.

Learners differ from each other in their individual strength, ability and learning styles and preferences. While teaching these differences are taken into accounts the aims and aspirations of the curriculum are designed to full fill the potential of the Childs' growth. The Language Contents to be taught and this include sound system, grammar and

vocabulary of the English language etc. The contents of the syllabus should be expanded to suit the present technology and growth according to that the learners have to change their ability and proficiency in the language.

The English language syllabus for the state government schools both in rural and urban areas is framed without any discrimination aims to equip learners with basic skills and knowledge so as to enable them to communicate properly. However spoken and written competency for the rural students is much lower than that of urban students. This is due to lack of language teachers in rural areas, English language and grammar is not taught with proper teaching method.

Shaari (1987), in particular, found that the major difficulty faced by many of the students is learning English grammar. In the case of Tamil students in rural and urban areas most of them are using their mother tongue while interacting with their family members and friends in their home environment as well as in the class room situation. These students hardly use English outside the class room, as a result of which they are poor in reading and writing because of their mother tongue interference. Lot of research has been done, Baljit Bhela (1999). "Native language interference in learning a second language usage".

This is obvious that the learners feel difficulty in writing English essays and text. Generally these students lack creative writing so that they always prefer rote learning. Most of the students commit grammatical and spelling errors in sentence construction, tenses, syntax, concord and auxiliaries. Parents are generally poor and illiterate, they are not ready to educate their children. School dropout is the main problem in rural schools. Teachers in rural areas prefer to work in urban areas and they don't take interest on welfare of the students. So educating a child is a challenge in rural side.

Even though illiteracy rate is very high in rural areas only few parents knew the importance of the education. Bennui, Pairote. (2008). These students feel difficulty in learning English language because of their L1 interference often they prefer Tamil as their medium of study. So the author selected this topic to identify the amount of interference effect in learning English language.

The present study is based on descriptive survey type of research on rural students of selected Engineering colleges who are pursuing Engineering degree at Coimbatore District taken as observed group. The research has been conducted and analysed the problems of the learners through their collected statistical data where the learners often find difficulty in using correct English both in speaking and writing. Thus the purpose of the study is to find the interference effect of the mother tongue and their inability in writing correct English Grammar while learning the language.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey type of research has been conducted for this study. The study involved 100 Tamil speaking students of rural background who are pursuing Engineering degree course in different Engineering colleges in and around Coimbatore District. The study requires an appropriate research methodology in order to arrive at an accurate result. As far as the study is concerned the researcher has selected sociolinguistics and descriptive survey methods. The steps followed in this research are preparation of questionnaire, selection of observed group, collection and analysis of data. Hundred rural students were selected from 10 Engineering colleges in Coimbatore District as random sampling. The researcher has not made any distinction between girls and boys, since the sex of the learners were not found to be diagnostic variable in the pilot study.

Total number of students from the urban colleges -50

Total number of students from the rural colleges- 50

Total number of students from both urban and rural colleges -100

Questionnaire was prepared for this study to elicit data. The questions were framed to test the interference effect of Tamil language in learning the English language grammar rules. The author selected one of the grammar items the ‘Subject- verb agreement’ (SVA) rules for this as empirical study. The students were asked to write correct answer from the following given exercises.

- They are fill up the blanks with appropriate be forms.
- Fill up the correct answer for the given words.
- Fill up the correct auxiliary verb forms for the given forms.
- Fill up the blanks with correct form of number (singular or plural) of the verb given in the brackets.
- Construct sentences using modal verbs and determiners

This exercise had been chosen to identify whether the students were able to construct sentences correctly following of the rules of Subject-verb agreement rules. After selecting the informants, a pre-tested questions were administered with due explanation and make them reading the questions, the students had been asked to give correct answer in the blanks to ensure the reliability of the questionnaire. In this method a pilot study was conducted to maintain the maximum level of accuracy.

Data were analysed following Norrish’s (1992) approaches to conducting Error Analysis. The data collected from the studies were subjected to analysis. Statistical analysis had been done first by counting the number of correct and wrong entries followed by qualitative analysis. The main focus of analysis had been on subject-verb agreement in English sentence construction of the informants. Crompton, Peter.(2011). The nature of errors and the rate of occurrence had been analysed thoroughly and discussed elaborately. So this method is to prove how much percentage the mother tongue plays as role of interference in learning English.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Subject-Verb Agreement

Table 1a: Distribution of Samples: Agreement between Compound Subject and the Verb

Fill in the Blank	Expected Answer
*Neither the supervisor nor the workers-----present on the work spot yesterday.	The expected answer is ‘Neither the supervisor nor the workers were present on the work spot yesterday.
* In Tamil the above statement is written as ‘Netru Melparvaiyalaro allathu velaiyatkallo velai sthalathil illai’.	In Tamil the above statement is written as ‘Netru Melparvaiyalar alluthu velaiyatkallo velaisthalathil illai’.

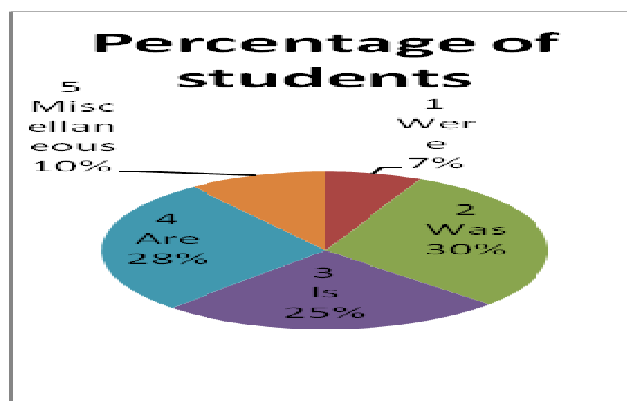
If the subject is made up of two or more nouns or pronouns connected by ‘or,’ ‘nor’ the verb agrees with the nearer part (H. Ramsey fowler, Jane E. Aaron, 1989). This type of compound subject present in Tamil but the grammar rule of the Subject –verb agreement is not strict as English. The SVA rules in English grammar mainly depends upon the singular and plural nouns otherwise the entire meaning of the sentence will be non-sensical. As in Tamil the sentence in the above table ‘Melparvaiyalaro allathu velaiyatkallo vellai sthalathil illai’, words like allathu ,ho and matrum are following

with noun as compound subject but often direct translation method confuses the learners while learning English grammar rules .

A statistical analysis of the types of students' responses in this regard is presented in the table given below.

Table 1b: Students Responses

Serial Number	Students' Answers	Percentage of Students
1	Were	07%
2	Was	30%
3	Is	25%
4	Are	28%
5	Miscellaneous	10%



Pie Diagram 1

07% of the students have produced the expected answers 'were'. 30% of the learners have written 'was' which agrees as 'tense' with the adverb 'yesterday' but does not agree in 'number' with the subject. The informants would have noticed the adverb in the sentence but might have failed to notice the plural subject part nearer the blank.

Problems with subject by neither or nor occur most often when one part of the subject is singular and the other part is plural. In such cases the verbs should agree with the nouns which are closer to them. 25% of the informants have written 'is' which is singular in form and does not agree in numbers and tense.

The reason for the error might be that they might not have seen the temporal adverb 'yesterday' and the plural subject part nearer the verb in the given sentence.

28% of the students have written 'are'. This answer agrees in 'numbers' but disagrees in 'tense' as there is a past tense marker, 'yesterday' a temporal adverb in the sentence. Of the 10% informants who have committed miscellaneous errors 5% have written 'should be' 'will be' and 'can be'. These answers reveal that they are not clear about the form of 'be'. The informants have simply added 'be' after the modal auxiliaries without showing whether their usage is appropriate or not in the construction of the sentence. Of 5% of the informants did not make any attempt to fill up the blank at all.

Partial learning or lack of confidence might have been the reason for not responding to the given exercises. In English there are number of subject- verb agreement rules, where as in Tamil language verbs do not need to agree with the number or status of the subject, the above errors may be due to interference from the learners' first language (L1) acquisition.

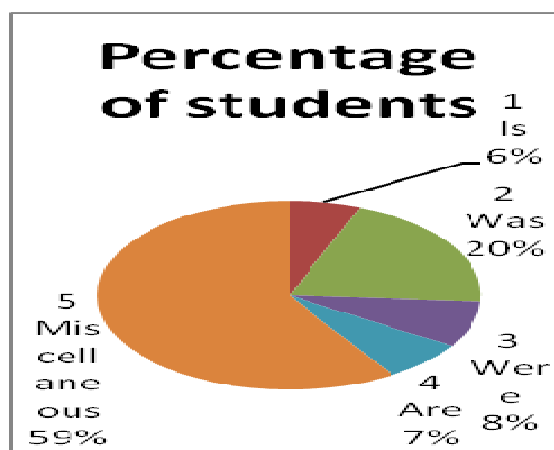
Table 2a: Distribution of Samples: Agreement between Subject and the Linking Verbs

Fill in the Blank	Expected Answer
* English: Geetha’s only relation-----her grandfather and grandmothers.(is, was, are, were)	Geetha’s only relation is/was her grandfather and grandmother
Tamil:Geetha yudaia orai ooravu avalathu thatha matrum paati.	Geetha yudaia orai ooravu avalathu thatha matrum Paati.

The grammatical rule in this sentence is when a linking verb ‘is’ followed by a subject complement, the verb agrees with its subject, not with the noun or pronoun serving as a subject complement. The rule of third person singular inflection often causes confusion among Tamil learners. The rule tells learners to use the third person singular inflection (-s) if the subject is a: Singular proper noun (Raju, Rani) and pronoun etc, but in this above construction the linking verb followed by the possessive noun ‘ Geetha’s relation’ becomes difficult for the learners to choose the correct answer ,this erroneous construction shows because of their Mother tongue interference. Statistical analysis of the types of informants’ responses in this regard is presented in the table given below:

Table 2b: Students’ Response

Serial Number	Student’s Answers	Percentage of Students
1	Is	06%
2	Was	20%
3	Were	08%
4	Are	07%
5	Miscellaneous	59%



Pie Diagram 2

06% of the informants have written the expected answers in the blank. 20 % of the informants have written ‘was’ a past tense for the verb. Though there is no indication of tense in the given sentence and as the answer was agrees with the subject support in number it has also been accepted.

Answers given by the informants:-

- Geetha’s only relations are her grandmother and grandfather.
- Geetha’s only relation were her grandmother and grandfather

The instance a) and b) above clearly convey that the informants have problems in number concord between the subject and the verb in the sentence given. 8% of the informants have written ‘ were’ and 7 of them ‘are’. These answers portray that they are not clear about number concord.

59% of the informants did not make any attempt to fill up the space in the sentence. The reason might be lack of confidence in the forms of ‘be’ or lack of knowledge among the informants. This problem is because of their L1 interference.

Table 3a: Distribution of Samples: Agreement between Singular Noun Ends with ‘s’ and the Verb

Fill in the Blanks	Expected Answer
*English:Physics-----a branch of science.	Physics is/was a branch of science.
*Tamil:Bowthigam vinganathin oru kilai	Bowthigam vinganathin oru kilai.s

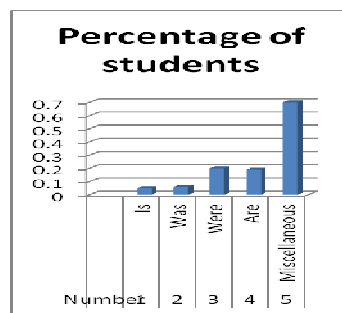
Answers given by the students:

- Physics were a branch of science.

A statistical analysis of the type of informant’s responses is given in the table below.

Table 3b: Students’ Response Bar Diagram

Serial Number	Student’s Answers	Percentage of Students
1	Is	05%
2	Was	06%
3	Were	20%
4	Are	19%
5	Miscellaneous	70%



Bar Diagram 2

11% of the informants have produced the expected answer .of which 06% of the Informants have written ‘was’. 5%of the informants have written ‘is’ in the blank given. 6% of them have written ‘was’ though there is no tense marker in the sentence. The response given by 11% of the students show that many students are aware of the fact that nouns which end with-s need not necessarily be plural, they could convey singular meaning and take singular verb as well.

20% of the students have used plural forms of verbs ‘were’ in the blank. This might have been due to the learners lack of knowledge in subject-verb agreement. The informants could have thought the subject is plural in form. The error is result of over generalization.

70% of the informants have not attempted to fill up the blank. These students hail from remote rural background. Their Mother tongue interference of the learners is the reason for not responding to the exercise, lack of confidence or inadequate learning is also another reason.

Table 4a: Distribution Sample: Agreement between Pharase and the Verb

Fill in the Blanks	Expected Answer
*English:The bullock cart-----at the doorstep now	The bullock cart is/was at the doostep now.
*Tamil:Ippozuthu mattu vandi vaasalil ullathu.	Ippozuthu mattu vandi vaasalil ullathu

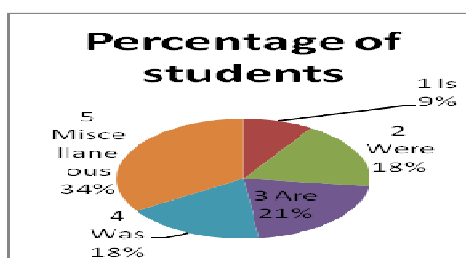
Answer given by the students:-

- The bullock cart was at the doorstep now.
- The bullock cart are at the doorstep now.
- The bullock cart were at the doorstep now.

A statistical analysis of the type of student’s response of sentence is given in the table below.

Table 4b: Students’ Response

Serial Number	Student’s Response	Percentage of Students
1	Is	09%
2	Were	18%
3	Are	21%
4	Was	18%
5	Miscellaneous	34 %



Pie Diagram 3

From the above table, it is found that 09% of the informants were able to give the expected answer in the blank. 18% of the informants might not have noticed the temporal adverb ‘now’ in the sentence. That is why they would have written the answer ‘was’ in the blank. The informants have written a singular past tense verb for a singular present tense ‘be’ form of the verb. Carelessness may be the reason for the error.

The plural form of the verb has also been used by the informants. Overgeneralization might be the reason for the usage of plural form of verb the informants would have thought the subject to be plural as it contains two words ‘a’ bullock and cart. 21% of the informants have used plural forms of the verb. 18%of the informants have used the plural form of the verb which denotes past tense also. 34% of the students have not written any things in the blanks .They might have no

knowledge about the grammar usage. The answer were clearly portray that they are not clear about tense and number concord.

The reason for the errors might be that the students had not noticed the tense marker in the sentence and also the number; that is, whether the subject is singular or plural.

Table 5a: Disribution of Sample: Agreement between Subject and Modal Verb

Fill in the Blanks with given Verb	Expected Answers
*The teachers can----- their knowledge by attending refresher course.(improve)	The teachers can improve their knowledge by attending refresher courses.
* Assiriargal putthaka pahirchigalilil seerrvathuin moolam mempaduthalam	Assiriargal putthaka pahirchigalilil seerrvathuin moolam mempaduthalams

In the following exercise, the students were asked to write the appropriate form of the verb given in brackets. Expected answer:

The teachers can improve their knowledge by attending refresher courses

In the above sentence, the subject is a third person plural noun and is followed by a modal auxiliary verb 'can'.

Auxiliary verbs plays greater role in Tamil but students often confused by the auxiliaries in English.

Without the help of the auxiliary verbs it is not possible to get some grammatical meaning in Tamil A. Boologa Rambai, Auxiliary verbs in Modern Tamil, example: Kol, Veentum, illai.

Here the verb should be in its base form only

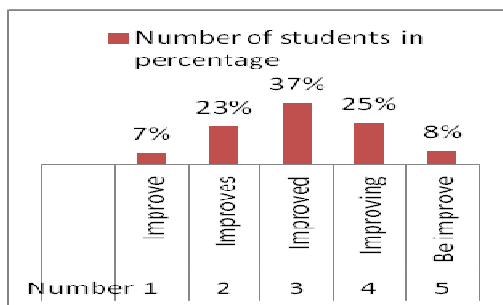
Answers given by the informants:

- The teacher can improve their knowledge by attending refresher course.
- The teachers can improves their knowledge by attending refresher courses.
- The teachers can improved their knowledge by attending refresher courses
- The teachers can improve their knowledge by attending refresher courses
- The teacher can be improve their knowledge by attending refresher courses.

The instance above (b) to (e) shows the informants lack of knowledge in using appropriate verb forms in the blank. The following table presents a statistical analysis of the types of responses of the informants for sentence .

Table 5b: Students' Responses

Serial Number	Students' Answers	Number of Students in Percentage
1	Can improve	07%
2	Can improves	23%
3	Can improved	37%
4	Can improving	25%
5	Be improve	08%



Bar Diagram 4

Only 07% of the informants were able to produce the correct answers in the given blank. 23% of the informants produced the incorrect answer ‘improves’, which agrees with a third person singular subject in present tense in the absence of modal verb ‘can’. So shows their partial learning.37% of the informants written incorrect answer ‘improved’.25% of the students have written ‘improving’ this is also isncorrect . 08% of them written ‘be improve’. Hence all the wrong answers reveal the informants have lack of understanding of the instruction given to them. This is because of their (L1) interference in learning English grammar.

Demonstrative-Noun and Concord

Demonstratives are used at the beginning of noun phrases. The demonstrative ‘this’ and ‘that’ are followed by singular nouns and ‘those’ and ‘these’ are followed by plural count nouns. The demonstrative and noun should agree in numbers.

The following erroneous constructions were found among the students

Table 6a: Distribution Sample: Agreement between Subject and Demonstratives

Erroneous Form	Correct Form
* English:----- We should try to stop this activities In Tamil: Inta vishayankalai naam niruthavendum	*English:----- We should try to stop these activities In Tamil: Inta vishayankalai naam niruthavendum
* English:----- I will try to solve this problems. In Tamil: Inta pirachanaigalaku naan theeru kaanban	* English:----- I will try to solve this problem. In Tamil: Inta pirachanaigalaku naan theeru kaanban
* English: Send this parcels to my friend Inta paarsalgalai yenathu nanbanukku anuppavum	* English:-----Send these parcels to my friend Inta paarsalgalai yenathu nanbanukku anuppavum
*English: These types of character built their personalities In Tamil: Inta vagaiyana gunathisayangal avargalathu Orunguinaintha aalumi uruvakkum.	*English:These types of characters built their personalities In Tamil: Inta vagaiyana gunathisayangal avargalathu Orunguinaintha aalumiya uruvakkums
*Englis:This chemicals make the rain water poisonous. In Tamil:Inta rasayanam mazai neerai vishamakkum	*English:This chemical make the rain water poisonous. In Tamil:Inta rasayanam mazai neerai vishamakkum

Demonstrative noun concord is very much essential in a sentence construction. The informants have used plural nouns with singular demonstratives and vice-versa.

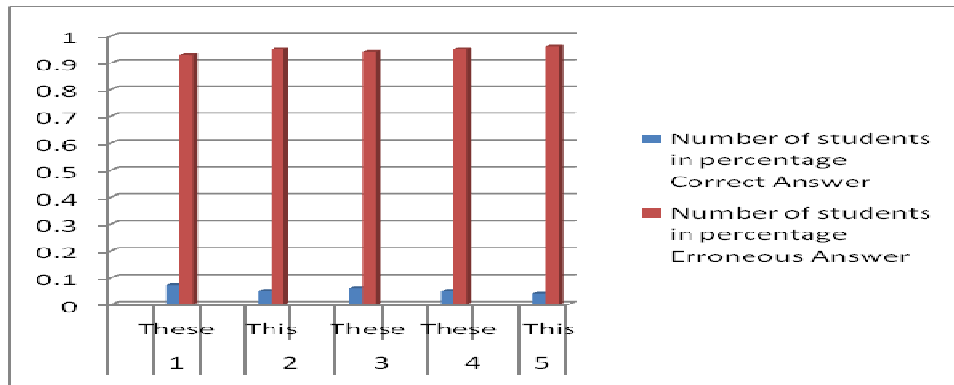
The errors may be due to the influence of the L1 of the learners where there is no number distinction in the demonstratives. In the following table, the demonstratives available in both L1 and L2 of the informants as presente

The primary demonstrative present two types of contrast. The first is a contrast in number. ‘This’ and ‘that’ are singular, where as ‘ these’ and ‘those’ are plurals. The second is a contrast in proximity, ‘This’ and ‘those’ indicate relative

nearness and ‘that’ and ‘ those’ indicate relative remoteness. The Proximity may be in space or in time .The informants due to the interference of their mother tongue, have produced erroneous construction in the L2. In modern Tamil for ‘these’ and ‘this’ the common form. ‘Inta’ is used and hence the students might have been interference with their (L1).

Table 6c: Students’ Response: Demonstrative

Serial Number	Students Answer	Number of Students in Percentage	
		Correct Answer	Erroneous Answer
1	These	07%	93%
2	This	05%	95%
3	These	06%	94%
4	These	05%	95%
5	This	04%	96%



Bar Diagram: Demonstratives 5

The table above shows that 93 % of the informants have given the incorrect answer which does not agree in number and gender with the antecedent. Only 07percentage of students were able to select the expected answer. The reason for the error is Mother Interference in learning English. The following table shows the errors committed by the learners quantitatively in concord in their own constructions.

RESULTS

Table 7: Errors in English Concord

Table	Concord	Students in Percentage	
		Erroneous Answer	Correct Answer
1	Agreement between compound Subject and the verb	93	07
2	Agreement between Subject and the linking verb.	94	06
3	Agreement between singular noun ends with ‘s’ and the verb	89	11
4	Agreement between phrase and the verb	91	09
5	Agreement between subject and the modal verb	93	07
6	Agreement between Subject and Demonstratives	93	07
	Total	553	47
	Average	92.17%	7.83%

The result of the table above revealed that the 92% students commit errors in subject-verb agreement. Only 8% could give correct answer. The reason for the error might be their lack of knowledge in subject-verb agreement. The

learners construct sentences without adequate knowledge of Subject-verb rules.

Problem in person- antecedent concord may be due to misconception or do not know the concord rules.

Problem in demonstrative noun concord were found to be due to the influence of L1- partial learning might have been the reason for the problem in quantifier- noun concord. Number concord happens to be a more problematic area than the other concord. The final result in the table revealed mother tongue interference is the main reason for the students who find difficult in learning English.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings revealed that the problems in 'Subject-verb' faced by the students are due to their(L1) interference which is the main reason for ignorance of the rules of the English grammar. The error committed by the students has been taken as an average. The rules of the 'Subject-verb' seem to be more troublesome for the learners. This is because of the learners, 'L1 interference'. These students should be given special attention in this problematic area so as to make them overcome the problems faced by them. Hence the fact of the research article proves that the students are hailed from rural background and they speak only Tamil language

So their mother interference is the main reason for these students' poor performance in learning English.

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