

**An Analysis of Errors in Descriptive Writing of Tribal Learners in Attapadi Region**

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**Abstract**

*English has gained a lot of importance as a language that connects people across the globe; so having good communication skills has really become mandatory to get better job opportunities. English has emerged as the most important global language as people use it as language of trade, science and technology, and to comprehend philosophy and education in a better way. But still there are certain places in our country where people believe that it is the language of British and learning the language would bring in their culture. They do not realise the fact that it will serve as a means to improve their livelihood. Tribal groups are one such group that still believes in the power of their tradition and do not accept changes that ruins their culture. The light of education is slowly entering into those areas. The importance of learning the language has to be highlighted to these groups.*

*This paper discusses about the background of the tribes, their challenges for learning English and the general reasons for the errors that they commit. The errors are categorised into eight grammatical aspects to analyse the frequency of errors that they make in each grammatical aspects. Thus the paper throws light upon the error analysis of the writing of tribal learners of Attapadi region of Kerala, India. A statistical test is also done to verify the results and check whether there is any significant difference between the errors committed by students of ix<sup>th</sup> and x<sup>th</sup> standard. The results shows that the there is no significant difference, and hence a change in the approach is what needed to hone the language skills of the students.*

**Keywords:** Tribal Learners, Writing skills, Grammatical errors, Challenges, Reasons for errors.

## **1. Introduction**

English language has gone through several stages of acceptance and non acceptance and is widely used in India for many years now. In a multilingual country like India, English is used as the unifying language that links people belonging to different states. The constitution also provides that English will be the language of the High Courts, the Supreme Court, Acts of Parliament etc. This popularized the usage of English for administrative purpose. Later India collaborated with many foreign countries for trade and their companies started flourishing in India. This also increased the demand for English since multinational companies hired employees based on their proficiency in English. These days English has become the language of elite that exudes confidence. “English symbolizes in Indians minds, better education, better culture and higher intellect”. People who speak in English are considered to be from a better cultural and educational background. So these days learning of English is considered as a part of accepting the changing culture and being modern. But there is a part of India which still sticks on to the traditions and cultures and live a life of drastic poverty, zero education, mal nutrition and all sorts of miseries without knowing the development happening in the other parts of the country.

Tribes, who mainly occupy the areas in or near to forests and depend on the resources available there for daily living, are one such group. They believe in the stories and myths that had been passed to them through generations. Since they live in the outer part, they are not much aware of the fast changing world out there. Even though, Indian government allocates funds for the development of tribal people, it rarely serves the purpose of uplifting the tribal community which doesn't even get basic education. Education is the only factor that would enable the tribes to make them shed their ignorance and mould them in to competent and confident group; which would help them to contribute for socio – economic development of our nation. They should be given the awareness that, education will not be a detrimental factor for upholding their culture and tradition; rather it will empower them to march towards progress and achievement. Tribes should also be competent in English which would enhance their understanding of contemporary life and be a part of nation building. English has become the language of confidence these days and proficiency in English can bring them better higher education and job opportunities too. Unlike other schools, tribal schools should also focus more on developing the language ability of students. Correct teaching method and timely analysis can make the reach of language more effective to these students.

This paper tries to analyze the level of English language competency, by analyzing errors in writing, of a tribal community in Attapadi area where the signs of economic development are very meagre; awareness of importance of education is very minimal. If the students are able

to read, write and speak English, they will naturally have the courage to face the outer world. The proficiency in English would also help them to learn other subjects easily. The ability to write is important for students as they are expected to express their ideas only through writing the exams as per the curriculum. But they lack writing skills the most due to their limited exposure to the language and make a lot of grammatical errors. They learn English with the help of a language that they learn from school (viz. Malayalam or Tamil). “Many studies indicate that for the beginning English Foreign Language (EFL) students, there tends to be interference from their first language in the process of writing in English” (Benson, 2002). Due to this they often get confused with the two newly learned languages and tend to make more mistakes in English. This definitely would affect their overall performance. A person performs the best, when a language is acquired rather than being taught.

## **2. Literature Review**

Error analysis is an inevitable part in the process of Second Language Acquisition. Learner’s errors have long interested researchers in the field of second language acquisition. Error analysis is the primary stage of any research that allows both the teacher and learner to have a better understanding of how effective the teaching- learning process had been. It is important to “focus on learner’s error, since they allow for prediction of the difficulties involved in acquiring a second language”.(Khansir,2012) The result of the analysis will throw light upon the language competency of the students, thus giving them an idea about what part they have to focus more in order to reduce their errors. It is the most effective systematic way for identifying, describing and explaining student’s errors.

Errors can be categorized into various criteria. Interlingual errors that occurs due to L1 interference and intralingual errors committed regardless of L1 (D. Larsen-Freeman and M. Long, 1991). Corder makes a distinction between expressive and receptive errors. They are the manifestations of expressive and receptive behaviour, and depend upon ‘formulation rules’ of a language. Errors are also classified on the basis of the linguistic levels ( cited from. Lee (1990) no.p.). He classifies errors as grammatical errors, which stress the need for grammatical accuracy in speech and writing for better communication. Discourse errors, reflects learner’s cultural and pragmatic knowledge of language use. Phonologically induced errors occur due to wrong pronunciation. Lexical errors, which occur due to combination with errors, belong to the other linguistic level.

Based on all these categorization many research works are carried out in different levels of learners to test the efficiency in language to give them remedial measures to improve communication. ‘An Analysis of the Common Grammatical Errors in the English Essay Writing made by 3rd Secondary Male Students in the Eastern Coast of the UAE’ focuses on

grammatical errors such as passive voice, verb tense and form, subject- verb agreement, word order, preposition, article, plurality and auxiliaries. The researcher throws light upon the factors that causes errors. The paper ‘Syntactic and Morphological error analysis in English Language among secondary school Students of Kerala’ analyses the error through a statistical analysis. The papers are analyzed on the basis of mistakes made on grammatical aspects like; usage of auxiliaries, SVO pattern, articles, preposition, correct form of tense and conjunctions. The students had made maximum mistakes in usage of preposition and the minimum in articles.

### **3. Objective of the Study**

The primary concern of this paper is to analyse the grammatical errors committed by tribal students and to get an understanding of their basic knowledge of the language.

### **4. Background**

The research was carried out in Attapadi reserve forest area which is a protected area comprising of 249m<sup>2</sup> of land covering the western most part of Mannarcadu Taluk in Palakkad district of Kerala, South India. It is an extensive mountain valley at the headwaters of the Bhavani River below the Nilgiris hills. The elevation of Attapadi valley ranges from 750 meters to 1.664m above the sea level. The major occupations of the tribal group includes trading of forest products like honey, spices, firewood, herbs, medicines, etc. This is one of the reasons for the increasing number of drop outs of school students in Attapadi area. Irular, Kadar, Kurumban, Malasar, Malayan and Muthuvan are the main tribal groups in Attapadi.

#### **4.1 Challenges of the Learners**

1. **Social Background:** All the students from this area are first generation learners, so parents or elders in the tribal hamlets are unaware of the importance of education. They don't give their children enough motivation and support for education. Majority of the students are sent to school as they are provided free breakfast and lunch from the school. They are not given much awareness about the job opportunities that they can have after completing education.
2. **Low-motivated classroom environment:** A good classroom is one in which the need of the learners are given higher priority. Most of the tribal school teachers do not have a proper knowledge about the socio-psycho background from which the children hail. So if these teachers approach the classroom with a negative attitude, it demotivates the students.

3. **Incompetency of the language teachers:** Mostly teachers of government schools in this area come from other districts of Kerala. And they would not prefer to work in this place. Usually it is very difficult to find out efficient English teachers who are ready to work here. There are some schools where Maths / Science teachers handle language classes for the learners. They are not competent enough to teach English to the learners.
4. **Misconceptions about the language:** There are certain misconceptions about language learning among tribes. Tribal people are much concerned about their culture. They think that learning a foreign language would influence their culture and ruin their native culture.
5. **Learning English as a third language:** Tribal learners learn English as the 'third language' at school. Their mother tongue would be a tribal language according to the group that they belong; then in school they are exposed to a common language which is Malayalam or Tamil for this particular area. They learn Malayalam or Tamil as the second language from school, and then they are taught English as the third language by using Malayalam or Tamil. Since they learn both Malayalam or Tamil and English from school, they get confused and they are not proficient in either of the languages.

## **5. Methodology**

### **5.1 Study Population**

The research sample includes 40 students of class ix<sup>th</sup> and x<sup>th</sup> from a Government tribal Higher Secondary School. The students come from different tribal hamlets of Attapadi area.

### **5.2 Data Collection Instrument & Procedure**

The primary part of the research is carried out by using qualitative analysis. The students were asked to write an essay on "The best day in my life". The same topic is given to all the students to find errors committed and also to study the difference between errors committed based on the standards.

### **5.3 Data Analysis**

Proper understanding of language and grammar is essential for students to convey their ideas through writing. Grammar is the skeleton of writing. Timely analysis of the writing is essential for the students and teachers to know whether they have achieved their learning and teaching goals. The essays written by the students were analysed to find errors on basic grammar; and also to study the difference between errors committed based on the standards.

It also gives an idea on what they have learnt and what is yet to be learned. Different methods have to be used according to the need of the learners; so error analysis can be used as a tool to judge the effectiveness of the current teaching method.

### 5.3.1 General Reasons for the Errors

1. Incomplete application of grammatical rules.
2. Poor understanding of phonetics.
3. Direct translation from mother tongue
4. Less exposure to the target language
5. Writing in a forced situation

Based on these reasons certain grammatical aspects were chosen to be analysed. The table given below shows the grammatical aspects and the number of errors committed by students.

### 6. Types of Errors Committed

Grammatical Aspect	No. of errors made by ix <sup>th</sup> standard students.	No. of errors made by x <sup>th</sup> standard students.
<i>Tense and Aspect</i>	36	43
<i>Mother Tongue Influence (MTI)</i>	9	7
<i>Incomplete sentence/ fragmented sentence</i>	28	34
<i>Wrong usage of Pronoun</i>	17	10
<i>Preposition</i>	52	37
<i>Capitalisation</i>	73	96
<i>Subject- verb agreement</i>	15	8
<i>Spelling errors</i>	88	103

**Table 1**

### **6.1. Tense and Aspect**

The students find it difficult to use the correct form of tense and aspect. There is no consistency in the usage of tenses. They get confused with the simple present, past and future tense forms. The incomprehensibility of the correct form and usage is the main reason for this. Less exposure to the correct usage of language makes them unaware of the wrong usage that they commit.

#### **6.1.1. Samples from ix<sup>th</sup> standard**

I am cry. (I cried)

My best friend's name was anushree (is)

I helping my best friends. (helped)

#### **6.1.2. Samples from x<sup>th</sup> standard**

That place is fantastic. (Was)

I happily return to hostel. (Returned)

My friends eating the food. (ate)

### **6.2. Mother Tongue Influence (MTI)**

Majority of the students learn Malayalam / Tamil as a second language only from school since their mother tongue would be different tribal languages. But they would learn Malayalam / Tamil quicker than that of English, as the exposure is more to these languages. Since the teachers are from other districts or non tribes; they teach them all subjects in Malayalam / Tamil. So they learn the target language English through a second language Malayalam/ Tamil; due to this reason they often get confused with Malayalam, Tamil and English. When they are forced to write content within a time constrain, they often use Malayalam or Tamil words.

#### **6.2.1. Samples from ix<sup>th</sup> standard**

My friend ariyathakaryangal padippichu. (Taught me unknown information)

*Aa gift was a very big balloon.* (That)

#### **6.2.2. Samples from x<sup>th</sup> standard**

We song kettu dance kalichu. (We listened to songs and danced)

She poi from there. (went)

### **6.3. Incomplete sentence/ fragmented sentence**

They express most of their ideas in fragmented sentences. This happens due to the lack of vocabulary or unawareness to use the right word at the right place. They don't know use commas, semi colon and full stop. Even a whole paragraph is constructed with fragmented words. This also shows their inability to use the connectors in sentences.

#### **6.3.1. Samples from ix<sup>th</sup> standard.**

*The reason is the hostel rule is month was in a day seeing in the children Sunday.*

*My best day my happy birthday in the was friends is beautiful gifts is my friends, mother give I am in the class talk that.*

#### **6.3.2. Samples from x<sup>th</sup> standard**

*My elder brother rajesh. My sweet brother. All time joking.*

*I am ixth class studying sholayur police station working Gopakumar sir meeting.*

### **6.4. Wrong usage of Pronoun**

In most of the papers, the learners repeated the names of places, people or things. They are not taught the correct usage of pronouns. This also shows that they haven't been exposed to good language yet. Regular reading or listening to authentic language will expose them to correct usage of language.

#### **6.4.1. Samples from ix<sup>th</sup> standard**

*I, brother, two sisters went to the temple. (WE)*

*I am best friends are Shyama, Soumya and Pushpa. (MY)*

#### **6.4.2. Samples from x<sup>th</sup> standard**

*Sholayur school gave my best friends. (ME)*

*I, my friends studying in the same class. (WE)*

### **6.5. Preposition**

The learners often get confused with in, on and at. They would not have got high standard materials to practice the usage of grammar. This leads to the inability to use the appropriate prepositions.

#### **6.5.1. Samples from ix<sup>th</sup> standard**

*She is study in good.*



*My brother gifted on a watch*

#### **6.5.2. Samples from x<sup>th</sup> standard**

*It was an unforgettable moments on my life.*

*I am studying ix<sup>th</sup> standard.(IN)*

#### **6.6. Capitalisation**

They are not aware of the basic rules of capitalisation. In many sentences they used capital letters in between. Some students are often confused with the capital and small letters of certain alphabets.

##### **6.6.1. Samples from ix<sup>th</sup> standard**

*ashwathy, soumya, preethi are my friends. (No capitalization for Proper Noun)*

*We saw flowers, Birds and trees (Capitalisation in between words)*

##### **6.6.2. Samples from x<sup>th</sup> standard**

*One day My all friends Going to the temple. (Capital letter in between the sentence)*

*all my friends and I am very enjoyment.(failed to start a sentence with capital letter)*

#### **6.7. Subject- verb agreement**

The subject and the verb should always agree in number and person. Errors from this area were less in number. Most of them, though they wrote fragmented sentences; they used right form of the verb according to the number.

##### **6.7.1. Samples from ix<sup>th</sup> standard.**

*My friends was happy. (Were)*

*All my friends is very lucky (are)*

##### **6.7.2. Samples from x<sup>th</sup> standard.**

*My parents was poor. (were)*

*Many of my friends has rose flower. (have)*

#### **6.8. Spelling errors**

Majority of the students are not even through with all the alphabets. They get easily confused with the phonetical sounds of certain alphabets. For eg, C,K, B,P,E and I are the often

confused sounds. Their weakness in reading also affects their writing. This is an area where errors were committed the most.

**6.8.1. Samples from ix<sup>th</sup> standard.**

*Unforgetaple.* (Confusion with *b* and *p*)

*Calss.* (Class)

**6.8.2. Samples from x<sup>th</sup> standard.**

*Verry.* (Very)

*Buettyful*( Beautiful)

**7. Statistical Analysis of Data, using T-test.**

Class	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
IX	8	39.75	28.81
X	8	42.25	38.04

\*t= 0.1482

\*df=14

The mean and standard deviation of the no: of mistakes committed by students is given in the table above. There is a difference of 2.50 between the mean values of classes' ixth and xth. The two tailed p value is 0.8843, which shows that the  $p > 0.5$ , this is considered to be not statistically significant. From the higher p value we can infer that there is no significant difference between both the classes. So it highlights the point that despite the difference in classes, there is no difference in the grammatical understanding of the students of Attapadi.

**8. Conclusion**

This paper throws light upon the basic grammatical errors that the tribal learners make while writing. On the basis of eight grammatical aspects that had been considered, it is very evident that the gap between the teacher's target and the student's achievement is very far. The result is statistically analysed by using the SPSS, T- test. Though the students belong to the classes ixth and xth, majority of them are not even aware of the basic grammatical rules as there is no significant difference in the errors committed.

The learners had made many mistakes in the basic aspects of grammar, even spelling mistakes. Comparatively, more mistakes are committed when the students try to write longer sentences.

A change in the approach is what is required. They don't come from a background that motivates education; so such an environment has to be created in the classroom. More LSRW skills training have to be given to the learners.

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