

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE FOR STUDY

1.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the rationale for the study. It explains why there is a need for a study of this nature. It outlines the research problem, its context and the setting of the study. It also states the objectives of this study and the definitions of types of errors. Finally, it presents the hypotheses relating to the research problem and introduces the research methodology that will be used.

1.1 Need for the study

This study arose out of a need to investigate why English second language students produce written language which is riddled with errors which appear to be prevalent and persistent. The phenomenon of **error fossilisation** in the written English of students in the Further Education and Training (FET) band which continues to puzzle language practitioners needs to be probed deeply for the benefit of students and teachers.

There is also a need to evaluate current classroom practice in the light of the research findings made in this study. This can lead to improvements in language teaching. Teachers in the FET phase are puzzled by the fossilised structures in the language of their students despite their relatively long period of exposure to English in various forms across the curriculum and to explicit language teaching provided in class.

1.2 The research problem

The English language plays an indispensable role as an international language of commerce, industry, politics and education. Its role in the academic world cannot be overemphasized. Many countries in the world have not only declared English as the official language but have also adopted it as the language of learning and teaching. This is so despite the fact that English is not the mother tongue of the majority of the people in these countries. However, many second language (L₂) speakers in these countries are not fully conversant with this language which they need in order to articulate their views and pursue careers in a world that is dominated by the English language. The Xhosa mother-tongue students used in this study struggle to express themselves in English. They have essentially no contact with English outside the classroom. The students started using English as a language of learning and teaching from Grade 4. Many L₂ students and people in general find it extremely difficult to express themselves in grammatically correct English. The occurrence of errors in the English of L₂ students seems inevitable.

Van Els et al. (1984:262) have this to say about the occurrence of errors in L₂ acquisition:

Like sin, error is to be avoided and its influence overcome, but its presence is to be expected.

The implication of this view is that errors are a permanent feature in the L₂ classroom. Richards et al. (1992:127) define an error in language as follows:

(In speech or writing of a second or foreign language learner)
the use of a linguistic item (e.g. a word, a grammatical item, a SPEECH ACT, etc.) in a way which a fluent or native speaker of the language regards as showing faulty or incomplete learning. A distinction is sometimes made between an error, which results from incomplete knowledge and a **mistake** made by a learner when writing or speaking and which is caused by lack of attention, fatigue, carelessness or some other aspect of PERFORMANCE...

The ungrammatical utterances and writing of L₂ students are errors rather than mistakes. The teacher has to deal with such errors. This means devising strategies to deal with errors in students' language so that students can produce error-free language and advance their careers. The most widely used strategy teachers rely on is to correct the oral and written errors of students in order to improve their language. Students, however, continue to make the same errors which seem to be impervious to treatment and correction.

Numerous and varied views have been given to account for why many learners do not master the rules and features of English L₂. The reappearance of errors, even after treatment in a classroom situation, continues to mystify language teachers and researchers. The process in which incorrect linguistic features (errors) become a permanent part of the way in which a person uses language is called fossilisation.

According to Nakuma, (1998:247) fossilisation is a "term used to denote what appears to be a state of permanent failure on the part of an L₂ learner to acquire a given feature of the target language." Nakuma further explains that fossilisation indicates the recurrence during L₂ performance of a form that is not only "deviant" from the correct target language form, but also believed to be "unchangeable" to the correct form, no matter the degree of exposure to the target language.

Hamilton's (2001:73) notion of the phenomenon of fossilisation is encapsulated in this view:

Even with the strongest motivation and the most effective teaching, many learners reach a plateau. Errors which should have been eradicated, re-emerge with dispiriting regularity. What is puzzling about this phenomenon is not so much that learners make errors, this is inescapable. It is that errors occur in areas where students should be proficient.

Fossilisation is indeed an important concept in L₂ learning and teaching and has been the focus of study by many researchers. It is also related to the notion of interlanguage. James (1998:43) explains Selinker's interlanguage as "a version of a foreign language spoken by its learners (rather than its native speakers). An IL (interlanguage) is a natural human language in its own right and should be respected as such and described independently or *sui generis*".

Interlanguage is the kind of language that has aspects that are borrowed, transferred and generalized from the mother tongue. The language which the learner produces differs from both the mother tongue and the target language.

Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1989:424) regard interlanguage as the learner's version of the L₂. It is characterized by systematic errors, poor vocabulary and hesitant speech.

Deducing from the above definitions of interlanguage, it is clear that the error-prone language produced by the learners who are the focus of this study can be categorized as interlanguage. Some aspects of the learners' L₂ are borrowed and transferred directly from Xhosa - their native language. Their language bears the characteristics of both their mother tongue and the target language. These errors in the English of the students may have fossilised. The students may not be able to develop their interlanguage any further.

1.3 Context and setting of the study

English is one of the constitutionally recognised official languages of South Africa. It is used by the majority of schools as the language of learning and teaching. The majority of students in South African schools are black students who speak different native languages which interfere with their learning of English. Consequently, the English produced by black learners deviates from the native norm, hence there is what is regarded as Black English.

The researcher, a teacher at a senior secondary school, is particularly intrigued by the consistency with which certain errors occur in the written work of learners in his school.

The researcher is a Xhosa mother-tongue speaker. He learned English under the same conditions and circumstances as his students. He has an honours degree in English Language and Literature and has been teaching English for the past 18 years, 15 of which are in his present school. The researcher can claim to have substantial knowledge of English and an above average understanding of its culture. He is passionate about the English language. In his interactions with the students, the researcher and other teachers attach importance to the four basic language skills, namely, listening, reading, speaking and writing, in order to enhance the students' communicative competence. Marking the written work of students is a crucial process and an indispensable aspect in the language teaching and learning process. However, the researcher and two other English teachers find it extremely difficult to deal with the disproportionately large number of students (500) at the school. Each of the three English teachers teaches about three classes of approximately 60 students each. They particularly struggle to give individual attention and feedback to their students.

Virtually all the students who are the focus of this study are a homogeneous group of black students who speak Xhosa as a first language. The average age of students is 18 years. They are all registered for the subject English Second Language Higher Grade. They all share the same Xhosa culture, customs, values and norms. Almost all the students come from the rural areas around the school where Xhosa is the native language. A few students come from the urban areas but their original homes can be traced to the rural areas adjacent to the school. They are also fully conversant with almost all aspects of the Xhosa language. The students' motive for learning English is that it is the dominant language in South Africa and the world. It is also the language of access to a wide range of cultural, scientific, political and economic activities, both nationally and internationally. A sound knowledge of English ensures wider educational and employment opportunities. Students also learn English for their own personal, educational, social, imaginative and aesthetic development. English is also the medium of instruction at the school.

With regard to the students' socio-economic circumstances, it can be argued that the students come from extremely poor homes where the standard of living is very low. Many students struggle to pay the relatively low annual school fee which is less than R100-00. The vast majority of the parents of the learners are uneducated and unemployed. Most students depend on the old-age pensions and disability grants paid by

the state to members of their families. The few parents who are employed are mainly migrant workers who work in the urban areas of South Africa, particularly in the Western Cape. There are a few students whose parents are teachers, nurses, policemen and small business people. Owing to their background, which is conducive to learning, the majority of these students display higher levels of proficiency in English than the rest of the students whose parents are poor. This group also appears to be more highly motivated to learn the English language than their poor counterparts.

The only real exposure the students get to the English language is at school where English is the medium of instruction. The students have done English as a subject from Grade 1 and as a medium of instruction from Grade 4. Despite this, they have a questionable and lamentably poor proficiency of English upon entry into the Further Education and Training (FET) phase. The Eastern Cape Provincial Department of Education has not supplied English textbooks since its inception in 1995. Students can only take recourse to old style textbooks, which are not compatible with the communicative approach to language teaching and learning which is recommended for the English syllabus. There is also an alarming shortage of English set books recommended for literature. Students, therefore, struggle to gain access to the kind of materials needed to expose them to the English language. There are hardly any books for student reference in the school 'library', which consists of a few old and outdated books, located in the corner of a classroom. Consequently, the students display a poor standard of English.

Outside of the school environment, students hardly have any exposure to the English language. A few students do have occasional access to old English newspapers, magazines and English language television programmes. The students learn the English language outside its linguistic and cultural milieu. They essentially learn the English language in a foreign language context in which English is heard and spoken in an artificial environment. Outside the classroom, the students communicate in their mother tongue both inside and outside the school premises.

English is taught in accordance with the requirements of the national syllabus for English Second Language Higher Grade. Students must be developed to be communicatively competent and to learn the language in context. The most important skills to be developed are: speaking clearly with confidence, reading with comprehension, writing appropriate English and listening with accuracy, sensitivity and discrimination. The students must also develop literary critical skills and grasp the nature of literary language and the use of figures of speech.

In the English language classroom, priority is given to the communicative language teaching and learning approach, which entails developing the ability of learners to communicate by using the language. Communicative competence, which entails discourse, grammatical, strategic and socio-linguistic competence, is also emphasised. English teachers are also required to integrate teaching by combining the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Communicative language teaching also requires language teachers to use skills which students already possess. The focus is on starting from where pupils are rather than from an idealistic notion of where they ought to be.

The role of writing is of utmost importance in the learning and teaching of English L2. Writing is simply a way of reproducing spoken language in another way. As is the case with the development of all other language skills, writing cannot and should not be developed in isolation from other skills in a decontextualised way. Writing should contribute towards the development of listening, speaking and reading skills. Writing contributes to enabling students to clarify and structure their own thinking and enables them to communicate with a wider audience than the one with which they are in daily contact. Writing is a process which includes planning, developing, reviewing, editing and presenting. Priority is given to correct punctuation. Writing activities include the keeping of diaries, informal letters, descriptive or narrative composition, recording and note-taking. Students are also trained to apply conventions appropriate to practical writing relevant to their daily needs and the demands of the work place.

Because English is the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) at the school, teachers are supposed to instruct their students through the medium of English. Examinations across the curriculum are also set in the English language. In reality, many teachers do not adhere to this language policy probably because they are themselves barely conversant with the language. Some teachers often resort to code-switching by explaining difficult concepts in Xhosa. Others even go to the extent of using Xhosa as a medium of instruction and rarely use English except for certain concepts which have no Xhosa language equivalents. A lot of time is spent speaking about English rather than speaking English. In this regard, Xhosa has become the **de facto** language of classroom discourse.

Indeed, teachers at the researcher's school are all Xhosa mother-tongue speakers who learned the English language in the same foreign language context as their students. The implications of this situation are that these teachers do not provide native-like models for their students and perpetuate a kind of environment that is not conducive to proper L2 language learning. The culture of reading newspapers, books and magazines is sadly lacking among the educators. Some teachers also lack the motivation to upgrade skills and qualifications in the English language. This state of affairs has grave implications for the

learners who depend exclusively on their teachers for their language needs within the school environment.

1.4 Aims and objectives of the study

The purpose of this research project is to investigate the phenomenon of **error fossilisation** in the written English of Xhosa-speaking Grade 10 and 12 students. The researcher believes that error fossilisation among students in the FET band has yet to be researched. The fossilised errors to be looked into pertain to the following: tense, concord, punctuation, articles and pronouns.

Errors pertaining to spelling, punctuation, sentence construction and the use of a wrong word are not included in this study. Indeed these errors have a significant effect on the quality of writing, but errors in spelling and punctuation are errors in orthography rather than interlanguage. Sentence structure is too slippery to capture in statistical sampling.

1.5 Definition of types of errors

1.5.1 Concord

For the purpose of this study, concord refers to agreement between nouns and verbs: a singular noun is followed by the singular form of the verb, whereas a plural noun is followed by the plural form of the verb. If there is no concordial agreement in a sentence, that constitutes a concord error. All concord errors will be grouped together. Common examples of errors pertaining to concordial agreement are:

- (1) My father **work** everyday.
- (2) I **loves** Nomsa.
- (3) Either George or Nomsa **are** responsible.

1.5.2 Pronouns

Richards et al. (1992: 296) define a pronoun as: "...a word which may replace a noun or a noun phrase". Errors pertaining to pronouns in the context of this study entail the omission of a pronoun, the use of an unnecessary pronoun and the use of an incorrect pronoun. Examples of pronoun errors taken from students' essays are:

- (4) My father **he** is a good man.
- (5) That is the day that * will never forget.
- (6) I like the girl because **it** is beautiful.

1.5.3 Articles

Richards et al (1992:21) define an article as " ...a word which is used with a noun, and which shows whether the noun refers to something definite or something indefinite". In English there is the definite article (the) and the indefinite articles (a or an). Errors with articles, in the context of this study, entail the omission of an article, the inclusion of an unnecessary article and the use of an incorrect article, that is, the use of an indefinite article instead of a definite article and vice versa. Common examples taken from students' essays are:

- (7) I saw * student standing near the office.
- (8) I lost **a** money.
- (9) I was **a** hour late

1.5.4 Tenses

According to Richards et al (1992:376) tense refers to "the relationship between the form of the verb and the time of the action or state it describes". For the purpose of this study, all tense errors will be grouped together. Examples of common errors made by students are:

- (10) He **is studying** his books everyday.
- (11) The taxi driver **was drive** very fast.
- (12) They **goed** to school

1.5.5 Prepositions

Prepositions usually occur in fixed combinations with nouns, adjectives and verbs. A preposition shows a relationship with some other word in a sentence. Many students make many preposition errors because a single preposition can have several different meanings and several different prepositions can be used with the same meaning. Examples of common errors found in students' essays are:

- (13) I visited **to** my uncle.
- (14) He left **with** car.
- (15) I wrote the test **on** June.

1.6 Hypotheses

The central hypothesis (H₁) of this study is that there is no statistically significant difference in the frequency

of overall errors of Grade 10 and Grade 12 students despite the additional two years exposure to Standard English in various forms across the curriculum and to the explicit language teaching provided in English classes.

The main hypothesis will be tested by investigating the following sub-hypotheses:

H₂ There is no statistically significant difference in the frequency of **tense errors** of Grade 10 and Grade 12 learners despite the fact that the Grade 12 learners have had two years additional exposure to Standard English in various forms across the curriculum and to the explicit teaching provided in English classes.

H₃ There is no statistically significant difference in the frequency of **concord errors** of Grade 10 and Grade 12 learners despite the fact that the Grade 12 learners have had two years additional exposure to Standard English in various forms across the curriculum and to the explicit teaching provided in English classes.

H₄ There is no statistically significant difference in the frequency of **article errors** of Grade 10 and Grade 12 learners despite the fact that the Grade 12 learners have had two years additional exposure to Standard English in various forms across the curriculum and to the explicit teaching provided in English classes.

H₅ There is no statistically significant difference in the frequency of **preposition errors** of Grade 10 and Grade 12 learners despite the fact that Grade 12 learners have had two years additional exposure to Standard English in various forms across the curriculum and to the explicit teaching provided in English classes.

H₆ There is no statistically significant difference in the frequency of **pronoun errors** of Grade 10 and Grade 12 learners despite the fact that Grade 12 learners have had two years additional exposure to Standard English in various forms across the curriculum and to the explicit teaching provided in English classes.

1.7 Research method

This study uses quantitative data collected through counting each kind of error per 400 words of each student's writing. According to Nunan (1992:3) quantitative research is "obtrusive and controlled, generalisable, outcome oriented and assumes the existence of "facts" which are somehow external to and independent of the observer".

The results of the frequency count have been analysed in order to either reject or confirm the hypotheses.

1.7.1 The corpus

The corpus used in the study consists of one narrative essay (The day everything went wrong) and one

discursive essay (My post-matric plans) written by Grade 10 and 12 students. Thirty students from each grade were randomly selected and each student wrote two essays of approximately 300 words each.

1.7.2. Statistical procedure

A simple statistical procedure has been adopted for this study. After a frequency count of each kind of error, the researcher added up the total number of errors and worked out the average number (means). The difference and percentage improvement with regard to Grade 10 and Grade 12 errors was calculated. The statistical significance of the differences between the errors made by the two groups was also determined by means of the Mann-Whitney U test which evaluates differences on outcome variables between two independent samples. The frequency of errors is represented graphically and in tabular form. The average number and statistical significance of the differences of errors in respect of each grade were compared to test the hypotheses. The practical significance of the differences between the errors of the two groups was also done to find out if the two years of teaching that the Grade 12s have had was meaningful. Finally, a correlations exercise has been done to measure the strength of the relationship among the various categories of errors, that is, to show whether there is a positive or a negative correlation.

1.8 Structure of the study

In this Chapter the problem of the low level of English language proficiency among Xhosa- mother tongue speakers in the F E T phase is identified and explained. The interlanguage structures which are suspected sites of fossilisation are explained in context. The aims of the study are outlined, hypotheses are given and the research methodology is explained.

In **Chapter 2** the concepts *interlanguage* and *fossilisation* are brought into focus by way of a review of relevant literature. This review provides the theoretical background to the problem identified in

Chapter 1.

Chapter 3 entails a description and an explanation of the research design. It also includes a description of the research procedures used and provides a rationale for each hypothesis. Finally, it outlines statistical procedures used to analyse the data.

The data analysis, presentation and interpretation of results are done in **Chapter 4.**

Chapter 5 summarises the results, deals with the limitations of the study and discusses the implications for further research and possible implications for and applications to classroom teaching.

CHAPTER 2

INTERLANGUAGE AND FOSSILIZATION: A LITERATURE SURVEY

2.0 Introduction

This chapter forms the theoretical basis to this study. It focuses on the concepts of interlanguage and fossilisation. The purpose is to review literature pertaining to the interlanguage hypothesis and error fossilisation. The two concepts will be debated and discussed at length and the diverse views and arguments pertaining to the concepts will be critically evaluated. Finally, research done in fossilisation and related themes will be reviewed.

2.1 The Interlanguage Hypothesis

The Interlanguage Hypothesis refers to the notion that the language produced by the second language learner is *systematic* in the same sort of way that first language performance is systematic. Both the first language and the second language reflect a set of rules that can be deduced and described. A learner's interlanguage should therefore be studied not as an erroneous version of the target language, but as a system in its own right. The language of the second language speaker is the product of a linguistic system that is distinct from both the first and the target languages.

Teachers involved in L₂ teaching often have to decide whether learners have produced language that is right or wrong. This calls upon them to describe the learner's version of the target language, their interlanguage, "a term suggesting the half-way position it holds between knowing and not knowing the target language". (James, 1998:3)

According to the Interlanguage Hypothesis, the interlanguage system is based on the data the second language learner is exposed to and shares properties with both the mother tongue and the target language. (Cohen and Robbins, 1976:45)

2.2 Definitions and descriptions of interlanguage

Richards et al. (1992:186) refer to interlanguage as the type of language produced by second-language and foreign-language learners who are in the process of learning a language. Second- language researchers and teachers realized that the language which L₂ learners produce differs from both the mother tongue and the target language. They regarded this language as bad and ungrammatical due to the

proliferation of errors.

Learners were encouraged to avoid errors. According to Stern (1983:125) , little or no attention was paid to the characteristics of the learner's language. The term interlanguage refers to the L₂ learner's language at a specific time as well as to the developmental aspects of the language.

Many researchers give different definitions and descriptions of interlanguage. As a result of this, different terms are used to refer to interlanguage. The term was used by Selinker (1972) who refers to it as the learner's intermediate language system. Nemser (1971) refers to the interlanguage system as an 'approximate' system. Corder (1971) refers to what he calls an 'idiosyncratic' dialect or the learner's 'transitional competence' or 'transitional dialect'. In this study, the concept interlanguage is used to refer to all the aforementioned terms used by Selinker, Nemser and Corder. All these terms refer to language used by the learner as she/he attempts to reach and master the target language.

2.2.1 Selinker's definition of interlanguage

Although Nemser (1971) and Corder (1971) wrote about interlanguage earlier, Selinker (1972) is regarded as the father of the term interlanguage because interlanguage theory received its full expression in his views.

According to Selinker (1972:214) , "the set of utterances for most learners of a second language is not identical to the hypothesized corresponding set of utterances which would have been produced by a native speaker of a target language had he attempted to express the same meaning as the learner."

These two sets of utterances prove the existence of a separate linguistic system based on the speech of the learner. This linguistic system is called interlanguage. Selinker attaches importance to the relationship between the mother tongue and the target language.

Ellis (1985a:229) describes interlanguage as "the series of interlocking systems which characterized acquisition". It can be deduced from Selinker's and Ellis's views that interlanguage is a conglomeration of the learner's native language and target language. Ellis (1985a:47) argues that the concepts interlanguage and approximate systems refer to the structured system which the learner constructs and also refer to a series of interlocking systems: the interlanguage continuum.

Appel and Muysken (1987:83) dispute Selinker's view of interlanguage as a kind of language somewhere

between the first and second language with structural features from both. They argue that interlanguage is “an intermediate system characterized by features resulting from language-learning strategies”. They emphasise that interlanguage is an unstable language.

The above perspectives on interlanguage contain a similar notion. Interlanguage is neither like the first language nor the second language. Barnard (1995:85) argues that interlanguage is the internalised result of a learner’s creative attempts to produce second language. It is the evidence of the learner’s cognitive strategies and hypotheses, and it is variable. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:60) argue that the learner’s interlanguage is systematic; that is, it is rule-governed and all learners pass through a stage of developing an interlanguage. Any difference can be explained by differences in the learner’s learning experience.

2.2.2 Nemser’s definition of interlanguage

Nemser (1971:116) refers to the interlanguage system as an **approximate system**. He defines an approximate system as “the deviant linguistic system actually employed by the learner attempting to utilize the target language”.

Nemser further argues that such approximate systems vary in character in accordance with proficiency level, learning experience, communication function and personal learning characteristics.

According to Nemser, the approximate system develops in stages from the first attempt to use the target language to the most advanced. The approximate system of one learner will coincide with that of another learner at the same level of proficiency with some variations due to different learning experiences (Roodt 1993:6).

2.2.3 Corder’s definition of interlanguage

Corder (1981:116) refers to the interlanguage system as an **idiosyncratic dialect** of the target language. The concept of idiosyncratic dialect is a development of Corder’s earlier concept of **transitional competence**. These terms refer to the rule-governed system (an interlanguage) a learner produces at a given time in his development. Corder argues that the language of L₂ learners is a special sort of dialect. Corder (1981:14) describes the learner’s language as follows:

The spontaneous speech of the second language learner is a language and has a grammar. Secondly, since a

number of sentences of that language are isomorphic with some of the sentences of his target language and have the same interpretation, then some, at least, of the rules needed to account for the learner's language will be the same as those required to account for the target language. Therefore the learner's language is a dialect in the linguistic sense: two languages which share some rules of grammar are dialects.

Corder argues that a dialect should be the shared behaviour of a social group and makes a distinction between the dialects which are the languages of a social group (social dialects) and the dialects which are not the languages of a social group (idiosyncratic dialects). Corder classifies idiosyncratic dialects into four classes:

- ❖ The language of poems (deliberately deviant)
- ❖ The speech of an aphasic (pathologically deviant)
- ❖ The speech of an infant (no plausible interpretation)
- ❖ The speech of learners of a second language.

Richard's (1974:161) interpretation of Corder's views is that the speech of learners of a second language is regular, systematic, meaningful; that is, it has a grammar and is describable in terms of a set of rules which is a subset of the rules of the target social language. The alternative name for idiosyncratic dialect is transitional dialect, a name emphasizing its unstable nature.

2.2.4 Descriptions of interlanguage

Interlanguage has certain *features* and *characteristics* which distinguish it from the language spoken by native speakers of a language. Bialystok and Sharwood Smith (1985:106) argue that interlanguage implies that the speech of second language learners is deviant with respect to native-speaker models. They argue that interlanguage is systematic language performance of L₂ speakers who have not achieved sufficient levels of analysis of linguistic knowledge or control of processing to be identified completely with native speakers.

Interlanguage can be regarded as a **natural language** like all languages. Adjemian (1976:299) stresses that interlanguages contain a system of linguistic rules and like all natural languages they can be used for

communication among their speakers. Adjemian also argues that interlanguage is seen as a linguistic system, a dialect or pidgin in its own right. Corder (1981:67) , however, sees interlanguages as a much more individual phenomenon than natural languages and, as such, they are rarely used for regular communication between speakers. Interlanguages are not socially institutionalised forms of behaviour except in rare situations.

Adjemian (1976:300) argues that interlanguages can normally be used for communication among their speakers. They share the function of communication with natural languages. The property of **mutual intelligibility** cannot, therefore, be considered one of the properties that differentiate interlanguages from other languages. Adjemian (1976:300) writes:

Mutual intelligibility is an inherent property of interlanguages as a result of their being members of possible human languages.

Selinker et al. (1975:140) concur with this view when they say that a group of speakers may share the same interlanguage and that there will be mutual intelligibility among such speakers of the same interlanguage.

Ellis (1985b:119) views interlanguage as **systematic**. The interlanguage which the learner has constructed at any stage of development is a consistent system while the process of development from one stage to the next is ordered and regular. Davies (1989:460) views interlanguage as systematic in the same sort of way the child's language is systematic. It is systematic on the grounds that the learning process always makes sense and is never arbitrary.

Another prominent characteristic of interlanguage is that it is **unstable** and **dynamic**. The learner's language, like all languages, is constantly undergoing change. As the learner approaches the target language norm, he reviews his language and his rule system changes. Rutherford (1984a:41) believes that syntax is the most unstable aspect of interlanguage. Rutherford (1984b:128) states that interlanguage is vulnerable or permeable to invasion by features of both native and target language. The learner constantly revises existing hypotheses about the target language to accommodate new ones. Writing on the interlanguage of advanced learners, Azevedo (1980:217) observes that learners move through successive stages towards mastery of the target language. When a learner learns the target language, he utilizes raw data and grammatical information available to him in the target language as well as his own mother tongue

and also whatever his "... **innate faculte de langage** tells him what language should be like". Azevedo (1980:217) clearly describes interlanguage systems when he writes:

An interlanguage is an imperfect, incomplete linguistic system as well as a set of working hypotheses about the target language. As learning proceeds, some hypotheses are found adequate and retained, others are expanded into more general ones, and still others are dropped as inappropriate. More often than not, however, some inadequate rules are kept in the learner's system. Regardless of whether these are mother tongue rules or rules devised by the learner, they represent gaps in his competence and are one of the causes of errors.

Interlanguage is also **variable**. Ellis (1985b:119) submits that each interlanguage which the learner forms contains "alternative rules for performing the same function. On some occasions one rule is used, on another a different rule". Despite the uniform way in which different learners develop, they vary in the course of development that they follow. For Ellis, all language use is characterized by systematic and non-systematic variation. Systematic variability is determined by the situation and context in which a learner uses the language. A learner may vary language depending on whether the context of language use is formal or informal. Non-systematic variability has two versions: one is the result of performance lapses, false starts and deviations from rules and the second occurs when the language user is unable to perform to his competence (Ellis, 1985b:121). Tarone (1979) refers to interlanguage as a chameleon. This metaphor reflects the variability of interlanguage.

Another important characteristic of interlanguage is **fossilisation** (comprehensively dealt with in 2.7) which in the context of this study refers to "premature cessation of learning despite repeated exposure and attempts to learn..." (Bialystok and Sharwood Smith 1985:102). It is a misconception to regard fossilisation as a phenomenon applicable to only incorrect forms of the target language. According to Ellis (1985a:48) both correct and incorrect forms of the L₂ can fossilise. Ellis also emphasizes that fossilisation is not necessarily permanent: it can be overcome by L₂ learners.

Adjemian (1976:314) refers to what he calls stability over time in the production of correct forms and incorrect forms. Interlanguages stabilize through the process of fossilisation. Fossilisation leads to a freezing of the target language at a plateau beyond which the learner is unable to progress. Adjemian

(1976:315) argues that some learners do not freeze their interlanguages at a plateau but continue their linguistic evolution towards the target language norm. These learners seem susceptible to backsliding which refers to "... regular re-appearance... of fossilized errors that were thought to be eradicated." Selinker (1972:216) notes that the "back" in **backsliding** means back "toward an interlanguage norm" and not towards the speaker's native language.

2.3 The influence of the mother tongue

As already indicated in 2.1, an interlanguage is based on the data and information that the learner is exposed to and has features from both the mother tongue and the target language. This implies that the mother tongue of the learner influences the learning of the second language. The phenomenon which results when second language learners use elements of one language (their mother tongue) when using another language (the target language) is called language transfer. According to Selinker (1972), language transfer is one of the central processes which produce what he calls fossilised competences and which are central to the L₂ learning process. These processes cause fossilisation and combinations of these processes produce "entirely fossilized IL (interlanguage) competence" (Selinker in Richards 1974:37). Language transfer, therefore, causes the fossilisation of interlanguage structures.

According to the notion of language transfer, individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture when attempting to speak a second language. Richards et al. (1992:205) refer to two types of transfer, namely, **negative transfer** and **positive transfer**. Positive transfer makes learning easier and may occur when both the native language and the target language have the same form. This similarity in forms facilitates second language acquisition. Negative transfer or interference refers to the use of a "native-language pattern or rule which leads to an error or inappropriate form in the target language" (Richards et al 1992:205).

Features of negative transfer are common in the English of the students who are the focus of this study. This is so because elements of the students' mother tongue, Xhosa, are transferred into their English. Consequently, they are likely to produce fossilised interlanguage structures. Proponents of the notion of language transfer believe that it occurs in all levels, namely, morphology, phonology, vocabulary, semantics and syntax.

Wissing (1998:18) researched the role of the mother tongue in Black South African English and explained interference as follows:

The linguistic habits of the first language in some way hinder the learner from acquiring the correct habits of the second language and lead to his transferring his first language habits directly to the second language.

Makalela (1998:18-19) argues that interlingual transfer arises directly from the learners' native language. Intralingual transfer originates from the overgeneralization of rules and structures of the L₂. Ellis (1985a:46) contends that interference "was the result of *proactive inhibition* which is concerned with the way in which previous learning prevents or inhibits the learning of new habits". Ellis further argues that learning a L₂ involves developing new habits whenever the stimulus-response links of the L₂ differ from those of the L₁. In order to develop these new habits, the learner has to overcome proactive inhibition.

Makalela (1998:15) argues that transfer theory was modified in the following respects as a result of further research:

- ❖ learners may not transfer, but may avoid using those rules that are absent in their L₁.
- ❖ learners may use the L₁ as a resource from which they consciously borrow in order to improve their performance.
- ❖ some errors do not arise from language transfer, but from other sources such as transfer of training (i.e. how students are taught).

Indeed, errors of avoidance are common in L₂ and are due to a lack of similarities between the L₁ and the L₂. For example, there are no articles in South African Black languages. Learners who speak these languages have a tendency of omitting articles when dealing with the English language. They are avoiding these structures.

It is clear from the presentation made above that both interference and developmental errors account for the errors found in L₂. Developmental errors are a result of a normal pattern of development and are common among L₁ and L₂ learners.

2.4 Other influences

The mother tongue is not the only source of errors in L₂. Students sometimes make errors because of learning strategies used, cognitive strategies, language learning experiences and personal characteristics.

One of Selinker's (1972) processes which he claims facilitates fossilisation is called **strategies of second language learning**. This view is based on the perception that learners learning an L₂ apply strategies. Corder (1981:12) points out that first language learners have an unlimited number of hypotheses to test whereas the L₂ learner has two hypotheses to test, namely:

"Are the target language systems the same as or different from those of my first language?" and
"If different, what is their nature?"

In order to answer these questions, students respond by using their internal learner strategies or Corder's "built-in-syllabus". Thus, if fossilised structures are a result of an identifiable approach by the learner to the material being learned, we are dealing with strategies of L₂ learning. Selinker (1972:219) gives an example of a strategy of second language learning by referring to a tendency to reduce the target language to a simpler system. In the sentences: "*I am feeling thirsty*" and "*I am hearing him*", the speaker has adopted the strategy that he must use the - **ing** ending in his verbs. Another common example of simplification consists in avoiding grammatical formatives like articles, plural forms and past tense forms or when learners make use of rules which are grammatically less complex than target language rules.

Another of Selinker's processes is called **strategies of L₂ communication**. If fossilisable structures are a result of an identifiable approach (by the learner) to communication with native speakers of the target language, then we are dealing with strategies of L₂ communication (Selinker in Richards 1974:37). Included in this strategy are errors that derive from heavy demands that are made on the second language forcing the learner to mould whatever he has assimilated of the second language into a means of saying what he wants to say or of getting done what he wants to get done. Roodt (1993:24) gives an example of black students who, most of the time, speak an interlanguage far removed from the target language.

Another of Selinker's central processes is called **overgeneralization of target language rules**. This process occurs if fossilisable structures are a result of overgeneralization of target language rules and semantic features. Selinker (in Richards 1974:38) gives an example that shows that learners will apply a rule in areas where it is not applicable and incorrect. For example: "*what did he intended to say?*" The past tense morpheme-**ed** is extended to an environment in which, to the learner, it would logically apply, but

does not. Another common example of overgeneralization is when students say they drive a bicycle. They are generalizing the use of drive to all vehicles.

Another of Selinker's process is called **transfer of training**, and refers to the process resulting from teacher-induced errors which are caused by the way in which a language item has been presented or practised. The term induced errors was first used by Stenson (1983:256) to refer to learner errors "that result more from the classroom situation than from either the students' incomplete competence in English grammar (intra-lingual errors) or first language interference". These errors are a result of being misled by the ways in which the teachers "give definitions, examples, explanations and arrange practice opportunities" (James, 1998:189). An excellent example of transfer of training is given by Roodt (1993:22-23) when he states that there is emphasis on the present continuous tense among English L2 teachers even when they are supposed to use the simple present tenses. Indeed, this is very common in Black English.

Kirby (1984:66) is critical of Selinker's processes which are supposedly responsible for fossilisable errors. He believes these processes could easily apply to a variety of learning problems and do not clarify what is peculiar to learning a language.

2.5 Latent language structure

Selinker (1972:211-212) elaborates on Lennenberg's view regarding what Lennenberg calls the latent language structure of the brain responsible for language learning. According to Lennenberg (in Roodt, 1993:8) , the latent structure has the following characteristics:

- ❖ it is an already formulated arrangement in the brain.
- ❖ it is the biological counterpart to universal grammar, and
- ❖ it is transformed by the infant into the *realized structure* of a particular grammar in accordance with certain maturational stages.

Selinker further argues that in addition to Lennenberg's latent language structure there is an additional latent structure in the brain which he refers to as a 'latent psychological structure' which is activated when a human being learns a second language. Selinker (in Roodt, 1993:8), argues that his latent psychological structure differs from Lennenberg's latent language structure in the following ways:

- ❖ There is no genetic timetable
- ❖ There is no direct counterpart to any grammatical concept such as universal grammar.
- ❖ There is no guarantee that this structure will be activated.

- ❖ There is no guarantee that the latent structure will result in the actual mastery of a language.
- ❖ There is every possibility that there may be overlapping between this latent language acquisition structure and other intellectual structures.

Selinker reasons that those adult learners who succeed in learning a second language and achieve native speaker competence have somehow reactivated Lennenberg's latent language structure. Learners who succeed in L₂ learning go through psychological processes which differ from those of learners who do not succeed. When learners attempt to learn a L₂ they activate a genetically determined latent psychological structure whenever they attempt to produce a sentence in the second language.

Regarding the second language learner who does not succeed, Selinker argues that this learner failed because he/she focused his/her attention on one form of the language he is attempting to produce from the beginning of his/her study of the L₂.

2.6 The relationship between an interlanguage and the target language

There is indeed a relationship between an interlanguage and the target language. When learners learn a second language (target language) they commit mistakes and errors. Corder (1967:167) differentiates between mistakes and errors. He explains mistakes as unsystematic errors of performance that a learner makes when he fails to utilize a known system correctly. Mistakes encompass those ill-formed utterances that a learner shares with a native speaker, such as those resulting from "memory lapses, physical states, such as tiredness and psychological conditions such as strong emotions". Errors are systematic errors of competence and reflect a learner's transitional competence. Speakers of second languages will tend to make certain types of errors.

Ngara (1983:35) makes a distinction between 'performance errors' and 'competence errors'. On the one hand, he refers to performance errors as **mistakes** the learner would make such as slips of the tongue, omissions, some spelling mistakes and unnecessary repetitions. The learner makes these errors not because he does not know the language, but because he is in a hurry, he is writing or speaking under stress or is simply careless. On the other hand, competence errors "... reflect the limit of the learner's competence in using the target language". These are serious errors which the learner has not yet mastered in his L₂.

Ngara (1983:36) attributes the source of competence errors to what he calls 'approximation'. The L₂ learner produces forms that are either identical to or approximations of features of his mother tongue. These approximations frequently, though not necessarily, deviate from the correct forms of the target language and thus constitute errors. Approximation accounts for a large percentage of errors made by the learner and is largely responsible for the development of local varieties of English.

2.7 Fossilisation

As indicated in 2.2.4, fossilisation is one of the important features of an interlanguage. In this section, the concept will be debated in greater detail because it is pivotal to this study. It will be defined and its causes will be discussed extensively. Lastly, literature related to findings pertaining to research done on African English second language in general will be reviewed.

2.7.1 Definitions and descriptions of fossilisation

One pertinent view of fossilisation is that of Rutherford (1989a:442) who describes fossilisation as "near-universal failure to attain full target-language competence". This view contextualizes the problem of this study which pertains to the prevalence of error fossilisation in the written language of high school students. Shapira (1978:246) describes fossilisation as "non-learning" and Selinker and Lamendella (1979:374) describe it as "stabilization".

Indeed the majority of English L₂ students fail to attain the proficiency required for basic communicative needs at the end of their schooling. Poor English matric results attest to this view. This problem of language proficiency even impacts on the cognitive academic language proficiency levels which are required at tertiary level. Cummins (1983:121) argues that this happens because the majority of English L₂ learners reach a plateau at less than mastery level where development ceases and fossilises. Students who reach the plateau produce fossilised structures in their target language utterances. Selinker (1992:252) claims that " ...there exist forms which remain in learner speech permanently, no matter what the learner does to attempt their eradication " and no matter what "amount of explanation and instruction he receives in the target language ".

Selinker's view is of particular importance in the light of the central hypothesis of this study which refers to the fact that there is no significant difference in the errors made by learners at different levels in the FET phase.

Larry Selinker (1972), the father of the notion of fossilisation, regarded fossilisation as a feature of the interlanguage system. Selinker (in Roodt, 1983:21), regards fossilisation as a "... mechanism which exists in the latent psychological structure of a person's mind". Selinker (in Richards, 1974:36) also writes:

Fossilizable linguistic phenomena are linguistic items, rules, and subsystems which speakers of a particular N L [native language] will tend to keep in their I L [interlanguage] relative to a particular T L [target language] , no matter what the age of the learner or amount of explanation and instruction he receives in the TL .

Selinker further argues that a crucial factor which any adequate theory of L₂ will have to explain is the re-appearance and re-emergence of interlanguage structures that were thought to be eradicated. Selinker and Lamendella (1979:363) point out that fossilisation is a concept that is central to the Interlanguage Hypothesis. They argue that persistent failure of the vast majority of adult learners to achieve complete mastery of a second language is a phenomenon whose existence appears to be generally accepted by the researchers in second language acquisition, as well as by many second language teachers.

Kohn (1980:46) refers to fossilisation as a plateau at which students come to "rest after studying or acquiring English over a period of time..."

Barnard (1995:4) defines fossilisation as a process which is an interlanguage phenomenon and when "interlanguage structures remained so stabilized for at least five years, they are regarded as being fossilized". Barnard refers to this as interlanguage fossilisation because natural second language development has been arrested before target language levels have been attained.

MacDonald (1988:115) contends that fossilisation reflects the different degrees of mastery, varying from little or no control of specific aspects of the target language to a post-systematic level, with only occasional appearances of the fossilised form.

Vigil and Oller (1976:283) point out that it is not "only the fossilization of so-called 'errors ' that must be explained, but also fossilization of correct forms that conform to the target language norms".

Ellis (1985a:48) is at one with this view when he observes that structures can be realized as either errors or correct forms.

Nakuma (1998:248) argues that once an interlanguage is permanent it “qualifies automatically as fossilised, given that it is by definition deviant from the native target system”. Nakuma (1998:252) further argues that fossilisation implies that the L₂ learner has, at an early stage of the target L₂ learning process, made the decision not to “acquire” the specific L₂ form which will be perceived subsequently by others as fossilised.

It is clear from the different definitions of fossilisation that it is a problematic area in L₂ learning and teaching. A common thread in the definitions is the notion that speakers whose language has fossilised fail to reach proficiency in the second language.

2.7.2 Stephen Krashen’s view of fossilisation

Fossilisation is attributed to various factors by different theorists. Krashen (1985) attempted to explain and offer a remedy for fossilisation by proposing what he called an **Input Hypothesis**. According to Richards et al (1992:182-183) the Input Hypothesis essentially states that for language acquisition to take place in a second language or foreign language it is necessary for the learner to understand *input* language which contains linguistic items that are slightly beyond the learner’s present linguistic *competence*. Learners understand such language by using cues in the situation. Eventually, the ability to produce language is said to emerge naturally, and need not be taught directly.

Krashen (1985:43) claims that most second language acquirers fossilise, that is, they stop short of the native speaker level of performance in their second language. In response to the question whether L₂ theory can account for fossilisation, Krashen suggests several possible causes of fossilisation. They are:

- ❖ insufficient quantity of input
- ❖ inappropriate quality of input
- ❖ the affective filter
- ❖ the output filter
- ❖ and the acquisition of deviant forms.

Regarding **insufficient input**, which he calls the most obvious cause of fossilisation, Krashen (1985:43)

submits that second language performers may cease progress simply because they have stopped getting comprehensible input. It applies to the foreign language student who does not reside in the country where the language is spoken and who has little access to native speakers, books in the target language and other material resources. Even residents who live in a country where little interaction with native speakers occurs are also affected by insufficient input.

The second cause of fossilisation, **inappropriate quality of input**, refers to the case of a person whose input is sufficient but is of the wrong kind. Krashen (1985:43) gives an example of a case of a gas station attendant who communicates in English every day but hears phrases like 'fill 'up', ' could you check the oil?', etcetera. This input is filled with routines and patterns and has a limited range of vocabulary and little new syntax. Krashen contends that even long-term residents who interact greatly with native speakers may be constrained by the inappropriate input they get over and over again.

The third cause, the **affective filter hypothesis** (Krashen 1985:44) , was hypothesised to account for cases in which "comprehensible input of sufficient quality is available, but in which full acquisition does not take place". The acquirer needs to be 'open' to the input. A lower affective filter accounts for the child's superiority in ultimate attainment. Krashen (1985:3) defines the affective filter as a "mental block that prevents acquirers from utilizing the comprehensible input they receive for language acquisition". When it is 'up' the acquirer may understand what he hears or reads but input will not reach the L A D [language acquisition device]. This occurs when the acquirer is not motivated, lacks self-confidence or is anxious, and when he considers the language class to be a place where his weaknesses will be revealed. The filter is the 'lowest' when the acquirer is so involved that he forgets that he is hearing or reading another language.

Krashen (1985:44) contends that fossilisation can be explained in terms of 'lack of need', that is, "acquisition stops because the acquirer simply does not 'need' any more competence - he can communicate adequately with his current grammatical system". Krashen recommends that fossilisation can be cured if communicative demands are raised and the performer focuses on grammatical accuracy.

The fourth cause of fossilisation, **the output filter hypothesis**, attempts to explain why L₂ users do not always perform according to their competence (Krashen, 1985:45). These acquirers appear to be fossilised but in reality they have acquired more rules than they normally perform. The output filter prevents acquired rules from being used in performance. Krashen (1985:46) also hypothesises that the factors responsible for

the establishment and maintenance of the output filter are just those factors responsible for the input or affective filter.

Krashen suggests that a necessary but probably not sufficient requirement for learners to perform their competence is that anxiety should be lowered and the focus should be on meaning and not on form.

The last cause of fossilisation is the **acquisition of deviant forms** by beginning acquirers who are “exposed nearly exclusively to imperfect versions of the second language” (Krashen 1985:46). Some students are exposed to a second language in extreme foreign language situations. Krashen (1985:46-47) clearly and eloquently portrays this situation:

The only comprehensible input such students typically hear comes from the teacher, usually a non-native speaker of the second language who does not speak the language well and classmates... Such input is filled with ‘errors’, intermediate or transitional forms and first language influenced errors. If this interlanguage is the only input available, and if the student hears enough of it..., his language acquisition device will consider it to be ‘real language’ and will acquire it, in the technical sense. Such acquired forms may be difficult to ‘forget’ ... acquired items enter a permanent storage.

This view epitomises and mirrors the situation in Black schools where students have no prospects whatsoever of getting the opportunity to meet with English native speakers. As a result of this situation students are exclusively exposed to imperfect versions of the target language.

Krashen (1985) suggests that the acquisition of intermediate forms can be prevented by providing good comprehensible input from the very beginning. Owing to the scarcity of teachers with high levels of L₂ competence, language laboratories, tape recorders, films and books can be used to provide comprehensible input.

2.7.3 Other views on fossilisation

The causes of fossilisation offered by Selinker and Krashen are supported and countered by a number of views by various theorists. When Vigil and Oller (1976:281) state that the fossilisation of certain rules occurs when L₂ acquisition takes place in the absence of native speaking peers, they are in agreement with Krashen's view on the acquisition of deviant forms. Selinker et al (1975:140) concur with this view when they say fossilisation of certain rules is "**non-simultaneous** [with the acquisition of the child's first language] and also when it occurs **in the absence of native- speaking peers of the target language**".

Krashen's **inappropriate quality of input** bears a close resemblance to Valette's (1991:327) view that school learners run a risk of even greater fossilisation when the classroom situation provides large quantities of "comprehensible but flawed input in the form of highly motivated but highly inaccurate peer speech". Valette further states that as students hear themselves and their classmates producing all sorts of "creative" language replete with errors, they begin to acquire and internalise these inaccurate forms.

Terrel (1989:7), however, is at odds with Krashen's **acquisition of deviant forms**. He does not support the view regarding the effect of an instructor's fossilised speech on their learners. He argues that learners exposed to other sources of input, like input from L₁ speakers, do not fossilise their language. The reality, however, is that many L₂ speakers, like those who are the subject of this study, do not get any opportunity to meet L₁ speakers.

Higgs and Clifford (1982:68) have the following view about instructors' influence on the language of their students:

The terminal cases whose foreign-language background had included only an academic environment all came from language programs that either were taught by instructors who themselves had not attained grammatical mastery of the target language -- and hence were unable to guide their students into correct usage -- or by instructors who had chosen not to correct their students' mistakes for philosophical, methodological, or personal reasons.

Valette (1991:327) is at one with the view stated above when he states that two factors in the school environment that can lead to fossilisation are contact with inaccurate models and the acceptance or non-

correction of errors.

A language teaching methodology which stresses communicative activities before students have learned grammar may, according to Higgs and Clifford (in Hammond 1988:105), cause the fossilisation of grammatical errors in the interlanguage of students. Students who learn a second language through the use of communicative models in which grammar is indirectly taught and acquired, do not learn grammar accurately and will fossilise incorrect patterns. Vigil and Oller (1976:282) agree with this view when they argue that the process of fossilisation is primarily “pragmatically rather than syntactically determined”. Valette (1991:326) holds the view that the phenomenon of fossilisation often occurs among “street” children who have had extensive opportunity to communicate successfully albeit with “inaccurate lexical and syntactic patterns”.

Van Patten (1988:249) disputes the view that programmes that prioritise communication first encourage fossilisation. He does not support the hypothesis that without explicit instruction in grammar and attention to linguistic accuracy in the early stages learners are doomed to fossilise.

Another cause of fossilisation is given by Bickerton (1975:173) when he says that fossilisation may simply be a lack of opportunity to learn the target language. Selinker and Lamendella (1978:155) dispute this view because there are instances where learners have had ample opportunity to use the target language but still produce fossilised interlanguage.

According to Greenbaum and Mbalu (2002:233), fossilisation “sets in when learners do not need to adopt ‘native’ varieties because the level they have attained functions adequately for their communication needs”.

Corder (1981:73) lists social contact as a cause of fossilisation. He reasons that when interlanguage speakers are able to communicate with native speakers, their motivation to improve their knowledge or elaborate their approximate system disappears. This means that these speakers have become complacent and think they have adequate knowledge of the language.

The main preoccupation in this section – namely the influence of faulty models, whether peers or non-native teachers – is particularly relevant to this research, since it takes place in a school which is rarely if ever visited by mother-tongue speakers of English. The explicit teaching of grammar, error correction and the provision of a variety of recorded models are offered as counters to the influence of faulty input. It also

appears to be necessary to guard against the complacency that results from feelings of adequacy.

2.8 Research findings in second language

Although relatively little research has been done on fossilisation, there have been studies conducted on themes related to this phenomenon.

Wissing (1988) conducted a study that analyses the causes of errors in the written English of black senior secondary school pupils and teacher trainees. An analysis of the students' errors reveals that they are intralingual and not completely attributable to direct transfer. He argued that they were the result of idiosyncratic language usage or merely mistakes rather than errors. Wissing looked into language errors like articles, concord, prepositions and the incorrect use of the continuous (progressive) form.

Wissing (1988:8) observed that pupils who model their speech and communication patterns, syntax and written discourse on the imperfect models of English taught by their non-English-speaking teachers run a risk of never adequately being able to master the colloquial context-sensitive English needed for successful communication in the real world outside the classroom.

Wissing also refers to the fact that there is a high frequency of standardized errors caused by direct interference and overgeneralization in the speech and writing of L₂ learners. He also observes that students often revert to earlier errors and that these incorrect language habits are ingrained and are more difficult to eradicate.

Roos (1990) performed a syntactic error analysis of the written work of Vista University students. She recommends the use of remedial feedback which should be in the form of problem solving activities. The activities could focus on the most serious or frequent errors which occurred and should lead the individual student to review his hypothesis about the rules which govern the use of the problematic language structures.

Manthata (1991) performed error analysis in the written English of North Sotho speaking students. The study simply categorizes errors, gives possible reasons for their occurrence and does a frequency count of the various categories.

Mooko (1993) investigated the efficacy of two teaching techniques, namely, guided peer feedback and

guided self-assessment. The study seeks to establish whether the provision of either of these two treatments in an English L₂ composition affects the quality of students' compositions. The results suggest that guided peer feedback seems superior to guided self-assessment in assisting in the reduction of micro-level errors.

Parkinson (2001) conducted a study to find out whether formal teaching of grammatical constructions results in a change in English L₂ students' written use of these constructions. The research also tests the assumption that given a large amount of comprehensible input in academic English, English L₂ students will automatically acquire this variety including its grammatical features. The results show that grammatical improvement was not observed either as a result of formal teaching nor as a result of extensive communication in the language.

Roodt (1993) did research on fossilisation in South African Black English. Her findings are that the English of black college students is characterized by a number of deviant structures that consistently crop up in their written and spoken work. The aim of this study was to determine whether these deviances have fossilised or whether they can be regarded as developmental errors. The results reveal that the English of black students at college has particular features that were not eradicated by two years of tuition by lecturers who do not speak the first language of the students.

Barnard (1995) investigated the effect of multilevelled semantico-grammatical consciousness-raising procedures on fossilised verb structures. She hypothesised that these procedures would reactivate grammatisation processes leading to the destabilization of fossilised structures. The study attempts to establish whether fossilised structures can be destabilized, how processes of grammaticisation may be activated, whether advanced learners are still able to improve grammatical accuracy levels, what cognitive process operate in interlanguage change, and how English L₂ teaching in the primary school classroom may be improved. The study concludes that multileveled semantico-grammatical consciousness raising procedures may precipitate defossilisation and that fossilised structures are not necessarily immutable.

Platt (1989:395) did research on the different values of "New Englishes" which are not "merely fossilized interlanguages but display creativity". He says research on "New Englishes" requires a complex paradigm combining different viewpoints, comparison across varieties and joint projects by speakers of native and idengenized varieties.

Most of the research summarised above was undertaken with the aim of eliminating or at least reducing

errors. The results speak more of failure than success, and therefore bear testimony to the existence of fossilisation even though they don't all refer to it by name. Approaches which they add to those listed in 2.7.3 above are problem-solving activities relating to a learner's hypotheses about rules, and guided peer feedback.

2.8.1 Grammatical features in L₂

Research in L₂ has identified non-standardized features pertaining to various aspects of grammar particularly tenses, concord, pronoun, articles and prepositions.

2.8.1.1 Articles

Wissing (1988: 58) notes that there are problems in the use of the definite and the indefinite article and that this kind of problem is typical of the kind of language error made by almost any learner of English. Second language learners often omit articles or include them in contexts where they are unnecessary or grammatically incorrect. Wissing (1988:59) makes the following distinction between direct and indirect interference:

Direct interference would be when items are translated from the first language and imposed on the second language, while indirect interference could be said to occur when confusion results from the fact that there is no equivalent in the first language for what is required in the second language.

Nwaila (1996:97) also comments on the deviant use of articles in Black English. Makalela (1998:23) concurs with this view when he states that learners have difficulty with articles partly due to the complexity of rules of article usage in English and partly due to the absence of articles in Bantu languages. Buthelezi (1983:28) examined problems encountered by Black speakers in using the article system because of its inherently complex nature. He also observed that none of the Black languages spoken in South Africa use the article.

2.8.1.2 Prepositions

Prepositions constitute one of the problematic areas for L₂ students fail to grapple with.

Wissing (1988:108) states that most errors with prepositions pertain to incorrect choice, omission and

redundancy. Finn (1996:6) contends that prepositions are a problem even to L₁ speakers of English. Azevedo (1980:220) refers to prepositions as “one of the most unexorcisable bogymen of foreign language learners”.

2.8.1.3 Pronouns

Pronouns are another problematic area in L₂. Pronouns in Black South African English are not always distinguished by gender. This explains why their English language often confuses the use of the male referent **he** and the female referent **she**. Makalela (1998:24) notes that personal pronouns tend to be used indiscriminately whereas in Standard English they are marked for gender in the third person singular.

2.8.1.4 Concord

Subject-verb agreement errors are a common phenomenon in the English used by L₂ speakers. Such errors show that the learners' interlanguage structures have not yet developed to the level of L₂ speakers. The basic rule that states that a singular verb is followed by the singular form of the verb and a plural noun is followed by the plural form of the verb is difficult to implement among English L₂ speakers. Barnard (1995:228) argues that the fossilisation of interlanguage concord structures sets in during the early stages of English L₂ tuition. Makalela (1998:44-45) contends that errors on agreement marking show that learners' interlanguage has not yet developed to the target language standards. Ngara (1983:38) holds the view that concord errors may be a result of incomplete learning.

2.8.1.5 Tenses

L₂ learners of English experience major problems with regard to the use of tenses. Indeed, research in English L₂ corroborates this view. Finn (1996:3) states that a common failing among Vista students is the incorrect use of the continuous present tense and the incorrect sequencing of different tenses in a single sentence.

2.8.1.6 The infinitive

The use of the infinitive is another problem area among second language users. Referring to errors

involving the infinitive, Finn (1996:5) argues that students find difficulty in overcoming these errors no matter how often this type of error is pointed out to them. He attributes infinitive errors among North Sotho speakers of English to thinking in the mother tongue and then translating directly.

2.9. Conclusion

This chapter presented a comprehensive view of interlanguage and fossilisation with particular emphasis on various definitions and features of the two phenomena. It is clear from this presentation that the two concepts are viewed from different perspectives by different theorists. The discussion of research findings pertaining to errors in general has given this study a theoretical basis.

It can be concluded that the discussion on interlanguage and fossilisation clearly reveals the shortcomings that can be expected from the students who are used as a sample in this study. The fact that these students learn English in a non-native environment and are taught by English second language teachers militates against natural acquisition of the English language. All these factors make these students good candidates for fossilisation.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter is devoted to the description and explanation of the research methodology and procedures used during the fieldwork. The main objectives of this chapter are to:

- ❖ describe the design of the study
- ❖ provide a rationale for the hypotheses
- ❖ describe the sampling design and techniques
- ❖ explain data collection procedures
- ❖ describe data analysis procedures
- ❖ discuss the quality of data collected

3.1 Research design

The research method used in this study is primarily quantitative. Richards et al. (1992:302) refer to quantitative research as “research which uses procedures which gather data in numerical form”. Quantitative research advocates the use of statistics and controlled measurement. As a result of this, the quantitative approach is regarded as objective and reliable. Quantitative approaches use methods in which an “idea or hypothesis is tested or verified by setting up situations in which the relationship between different subjects can be determined” (Richards et al. 1992:133).

The research design of this study can be categorized under the **analytic** and **deductive** approach. Seliger and Shohamy (1989:27) define an analytic approach as one that identifies a single factor or a cluster of factors. It focuses on a more specific aspect of language proficiency, for example, pronunciation. An analytic approach means that the “second language phenomenon is analysed in its constituent parts and one or a cluster of these constituent parts is examined in greater detail to the exclusion of other factors”. (Seliger and Shohamy 1989:56). Indeed, this project focuses on a single factor: error fossilisation in the written English of Xhosa-speaking students. The selection of certain errors to the exclusion of others is also analytical.

This research is also deductive hypothesis-testing research with deductive objectives. Seliger and

Shohamy (1989:58) define deductive research as follows:

Research with a *deductive* objective or purpose begins with a preconceived notion of what may be found. This preconceived notion is then formulated as a *prediction* or *hypothesis* to be confirmed or rejected. This hypothesis is usually grounded in a theory which attempts to explain the behaviour in question.

This study represents a descriptive design. According to Macmillan and Schumacher (1993:35), research using a descriptive design “simply describes an existing phenomenon by using numbers to characterise individuals or a group”. They further argue that in descriptive research there is no manipulation of subjects. The researcher measures things as they are. This study, therefore, describes phenomena that occur naturally without the intervention of an experiment. However, the researcher exercised some control of factors in the research context by randomly selecting the subjects, selecting the language data to be collected and choosing the method of measurement. Although the research context was controlled to a degree, the data were collected from a naturally occurring group of subjects. The control, therefore, did not extend to the manipulation or treatment of the research subjects. Seliger and Shohamy (198:124) describe descriptive research as deductive in its objectives and as often quantitative. It also has a narrow scope of investigation.

3.2 Rationale for hypotheses

The central hypotheses of this study, which states that there is no statistically significant difference in the frequency of overall errors of Grade 10 and Grade 12 students despite the additional two years exposure to Standard English in various forms across the curriculum and to the explicit language teaching provided in English classes, is grounded in interlanguage and fossilisation theory. Interlanguage theory presupposes that an interlanguage is an interim language spoken by L₂ learners. Fossilisation theory states that some L₂ learners never achieve native-like competence but cease to learn the L₂ however much exposure they receive. Certain forms of the target language remain in their language; that is, learners produce fossilised structures.

The hypothesis that the language errors of Grade 12 learners are not significantly different from those of the Grade 10 learners implies that their language has reached a plateau despite their relatively longer exposure.

The sub-hypotheses, like the central hypothesis, are also grounded in interlanguage and fossilisation theory. They state that there is no statistically significant difference between various language errors of the Grade 10 and Grade 12 students. However, they are more specific in the sense that they refer to specific errors rather than errors in general. The first refers to concord errors, the second to pronoun errors, the third to article errors, the fourth to tense errors and the fifth to preposition errors.

One must assess the overall errors made in order to test the central hypothesis, and assess each kind of error in order to test the sub-hypotheses.

3.3 Sampling design and techniques

3.3.1. The study population

The population (189 students) of this study were all Grade 10 and 12 students at the researcher's school. It consisted of 104 Grade 10 and 85 Grade 12 students who are Xhosa native language speakers.

3.3.2 Sampling

A total sample of 60 students was randomly selected from the population of 189 students. Mulder (1989: 55) defines a sample as "group which is selected from the population while remaining as representative as possible". Indeed, the selected subjects represent the characteristics of the overall population. All Grade 10 and 12 learners were required to write the essays used in this study as part of their academic training before the sample was selected. This helped to create a natural setting in which students would not be aware that they were guinea pigs.

A method of random sampling described in Mulder (1989:57-58) was used to select the sample. All 104 in Grade 10 were given a number (1, 2, 3, 4 etcetera) up to 104. Each number was written on a piece of paper and all the papers were then put in a container and thoroughly shuffled. One student took out the papers one by one until 30 papers were selected. The same procedure was used to select the sample from

the 85 Grade 12 students. The end result was the selection of a sample of 20 girls and 10 boys in Grade 10 and 18 girls and 12 boys in Grade 12.

3.3.3 Description of subjects

A comprehensive description of the study population is done in 1.3. The 60 subjects investigated in this study are all students at a Further Education and Training (FET) school in the Butterworth district of the Eastern Cape.

The Grade 10 students, 10 males and 20 females, whose ages range from 15 to 20, completed the General Education and Training (GET) certificate in 2002. They have been exposed to English as a subject since Grade 1 and English as a medium of instruction since Grade 3, a total of 7 years. The students' age difference is not regarded as significant in terms of language development. All the students are doing Grade 10 for the first time. All have similar backgrounds in terms of language exposure, knowledge, schooling and socio-economic status.

The Grade 12 students, 12 males and 18 females, whose ages range from 17 to 24, have already completed two years in the F E T phase. They have been exposed to English as a subject since Grade 1 and have been exposed to English as a language of learning and teaching for nine years. Owing to their relatively lengthy exposure to English as a subject and medium of instruction, they are supposed to have a superior proficiency level in English than their Grade 10 counterparts. All the students are doing Grade 12 for the first time.

3.4 Data collection procedures

3.4.1 The corpus

Two sets of data were collected for this study. In the first set, 30 Grade 10 students wrote a narrative and a discursive essay. The same procedure was used in respect of the 30 Grade 12 students. The topics for the two set essays were in accordance with the syllabus requirements. Each student was required to write two different composition of between 200 and 300 words. The students wrote essays on the following topics:

- ❖ The day everything went wrong (narrative)
- ❖ My post-matric plans (discursive)

The 60 compositions of the sampled students were marked in accordance with the requirements of the study; that is, the five errors that are the focus of this study were identified and counted.

3.4.2 Procedure

One method used to collect data in descriptive research is a test. Tests may be formal language tests like writing an assignment or doing communicative activities. Seliger and Shohamy (1989:176) define a test as:

a procedure used to collect data on subjects' ability or knowledge of certain disciplines. In second language acquisition research, tests are generally used to collect data about the subject's ability in and knowledge of the second language in areas such as vocabulary, grammar reading, metalinguistic awareness and general proficiency.

Indeed, the essays used to collect data for this study were designed to elicit data pertaining to the different types of errors that are the focus of this study. The narrative essay, for example, was intended to elicit the use of the past tenses. The discursive essay was intended to elicit the use of the future tenses.

The essays were written in class at the beginning of the second quarter (April 2003). A period of 2 hours was allocated for this task. They were written under strictly examination conditions with the researcher acting as an invigilator. This was done to make sure that students did not receive any assistance inside and outside the classroom. This also excluded the possibility of previous preparation. However, the topics were discussed in a classroom situation before they wrote the essays. This was done to ensure that students knew how they were expected to approach the writing of the essays.

Although the required length of the essay was between 200 and 300 words, the researcher was only concerned about the first 200 words because only the first 200 words were marked for the purpose of this study. This means that a total of 400 words per student from the two essays was used as the data of this study.

3.4.3 Degree of explicitness

According to Seliger and Shohamy (1989:39) data collection procedures in second language research vary in terms of the degree of explicitness with which the procedure focuses on the data that are sought.

The procedures used to collect data for this study are not structured and do not focus directly on the data (error fossilisation) being sought. The subjects are not aware of the data being sought. The subjects produce compositions in a normal, contextual and natural way. Unlike in structured tests, they do not have to make judgements on the grammaticality of sentences. Seliger and Shohamy (1989:156) argue that broad and general procedures which do not focus on the data being sought have a **low** degree of explicitness. They make the following distinction between low explicitness and high explicitness tests:

Tests with a high level of explicitness employ a variety of structured techniques to elicit language data while tests of low explicitness collect/record/gather language which is produced spontaneously, often without the subjects being aware that their language is being assessed (Seliger and Shohamy, 1989:176).

3.4.4 Reliability

The researcher assured the quality of the data and data collection procedures and ensured that the study was reliable. De Vos (2000:85) defines reliability as the accuracy or precision of an instrument; as the degree of consistency between two independently derived sets of scores, and as the extent to which independent administrations of the same instrument yield the same (or similar) results under comparable conditions. Richards (1992:317) say reliability in testing is:

a measure of the degree to which a test gives consistent results .A test is said to be reliable if it gives the same results when it is given on different occasions or when it is used by different people.

The researcher believes that the same test would yield similar results if it were replicated in another situation, with the proviso that the constructs to be analysed (the different types of errors under investigation) are understood and applied in the same way as by the current researcher. The method used

to collect data is reliable. The nature of the test allowed the students to use their natural language unlike in structured or standardized tests that have questions that might confuse students. Therefore, the scores obtained by the students represent their language skills.

The collection of two sets of data from the students was intended to ensure that the students had the opportunity to use the English language in different contexts. This also gave them the chance to display their linguistic skills. The 400 words that were considered from each student's writing ensured greater reliability in measuring the variables of this study. The researcher also believes that the cut-off of 200 words per essay makes the research more replicable. No student could influence the results disproportionately, that is, much or more less than the others and no group could influence results by having more or less time for writing.

The random sample of 30 learners per grade is indeed representative of the total population of Grade 10 and Grade 12 students at the school. With random samples as little as 30, it is possible that one of the groups may have included more students with language aptitude than others. It could be argued that a different sampling method might have yielded a better representative sample.

Only the researcher marked the essays and counted the errors. This approach is objective in the sense that there is consensus among English teachers as to what constitutes an error. The researcher therefore adopted conventionally ways of identifying errors.

3.4.5 Validity

The extent to which the measuring procedures measured what they were supposed to measure ensured the validity of these procedures. Richards (1992:396) defines validity in testing as "the degree to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure, or can be used successfully for the purposes for which it is intended". Macmillan and Schumacher (1993:158) differentiate between internal and external validity. Internal validity expresses the extent to which extraneous variables have been controlled or accounted for. External validity refers to the generalisability of the results, that is, the extent to which the results and conclusions can be generalised to other people and settings. Internal validity was ensured by the fact that the data were collected in a controlled natural classroom setting and strictly controlled examination conditions. The study also has external validity in the sense that its results can be generalized to the population of all students in the same grades or even different students in other schools.

3.5 Data capturing

In order to use a uniform and objective procedure for the identification of the different errors, the researcher counted the first 200 words in each student's essay and counted the frequency of errors in that section only.

Each error was recorded by means of a tally mark under the relevant error category. Examples of each type of error made were recorded in a separate booklet. The total number of errors made and the average number were worked out. Finally, the researcher determined the total number of errors made by each learner and in each category.

3.6 Data analysis

The data collected for this study were analysed by means of descriptive statistics. According to Welman and Kruger (1994:208, descriptive statistics is concerned with the description or summarisation of the data obtained for a group of individuals. Huysamen (1998:4) states that the purpose of descriptive statistics is to reduce large amounts of data to facilitate the drawing of conclusions about them.

The results pertaining to the central hypothesis which deals with overall errors will be presented by means of a bar graph and two tables which will show the frequency (means) of errors made by the two groups of learners. The same tables and the bar graph will be used to show the results of the various sub-hypotheses. A table will show the significance of the differences between the various types of errors made by the two groups. Another table will show the percentage improvement and effect values of Grade 12 learners compared to Grade 10 learners. A table showing correlation coefficients and a scatter diagram will be used to show the extent of the relationship between the various categories of errors.

3.7. Shortcomings

The researcher believes that the collected data is of high quality. However, there are certain shortcomings, limitations and gaps in the data. Narrative essays essentially require the use of the past tenses. On many occasions the researcher had to decide whether an error was a tense or concord error.

The following sentences taken from the subjects' essays exemplify this dilemma:

- ❖ My parents **gives** me permission.
- ❖ The **traffics wants** a permission.

The student in the given examples was giving an account of his/her experiences on the essay. "The day everything went wrong". The correct way of expressing the sentences in the correct tense is:

- ❖ My parents **gave** me permission.
- ❖ The traffic cops **wanted** a licence.

Indeed, these are tense errors. But the student also cannot apply the rule regarding subject-verb agreement (concord error). In such instances, the research classified the errors as both tense and concord errors.

Another problem pertained to preposition errors. This problem manifested itself when students used clearly wrong or unnecessary prepositions. This problem was worsened by the fact that, most of the time, it was not what the students wanted to say. The following examples show this:

- ❖ She was a person who *like* **for** cleaning.
- ❖ The driver hiked **with** cars.

It is, however, clear that the students have a problem regarding the use of prepositions. Overall, the essays succeeded in eliciting the kinds of errors that are the focus of this study.

CHAPTER 4

THE RESULTS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the results of the data relating to the research project. It provides a detailed presentation of statistical results so as to test the hypothesis. It is the purpose of this research to establish the extent of fossilisation in the written English of Xhosa-speaking students during the further Education and Training phase with specific focus on the English language of Grade 10 and Grade 12 students. The data collected for the research was subjected to a descriptive statistical analysis that involves writing the number of occurrences of each kind of error and a calculation of the frequency of each error. The analysis focussed on 400 words of each student's writing. This means that a total of 12 000 words were used for each sample of 30 students from each grade. The extent of fossilisation in the English language of Xhosa speaking Further Education and Training students is determined by way of a close analysis of the findings.

The first section of this chapter presents statistical results in respect of the central hypothesis and the various sub-hypotheses pertaining to tenses, concord, articles, prepositions and pronouns. The following analyses are provided:

- ❖ Error frequencies for the two grades, showing total errors, mean scores, standard deviations and range of scores for Grade 10 in Table 1 and for Grade 12 in Table 2, and a comparison of error totals in a bar graph in Figure 1;
- ❖ Various measures of the statistical significance of the differences in Table 3 and Table 4;
- ❖ The practical significance of differences in Table 5, which also provides the percentage improvement in each of the errors.
- ❖ Correlations between errors in Table 6 and Figure 1

The second section presents a discussion of the errors themselves.

The third section focuses on an analysis of correlations in order to establish the strength and direction of the relationship between the various kinds of errors and to ascertain whether the students' performance in one aspect is related to performance in another.

The last section contains concluding interpretations and a discussion of the findings of this study.

4.1 Statistical data

4.1.1 Error frequencies

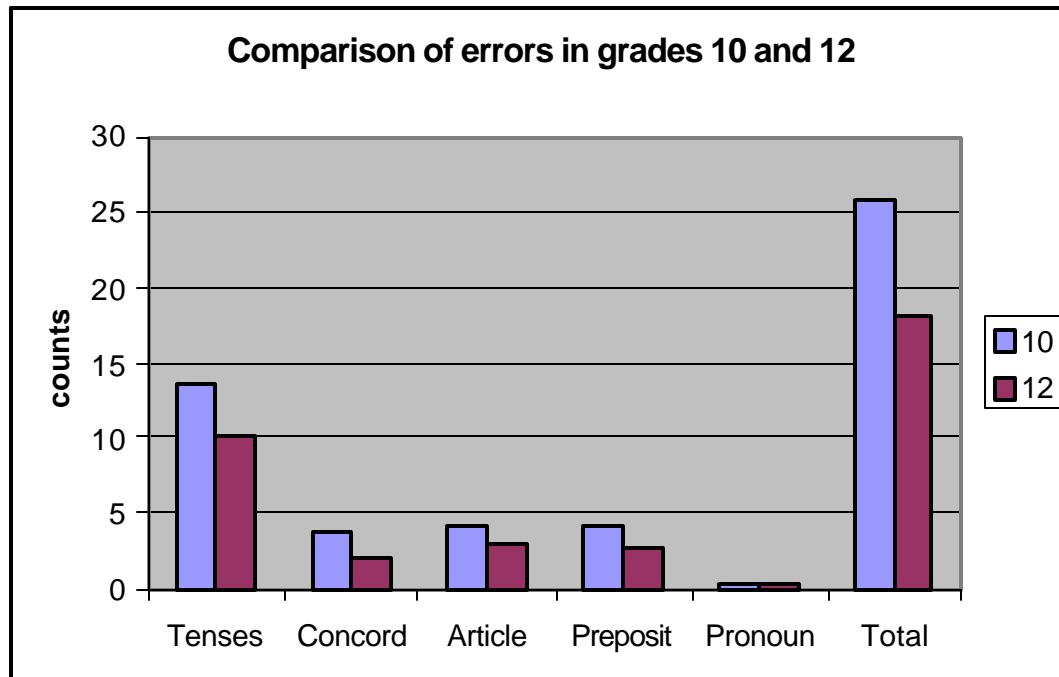
Table 1: Error frequencies for Grade 10

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tenses	30	2	32	405	13.50	7.089
Concord	30	0	11	110	3.67	3.044
Article	30	0	12	121	4.03	2.735
Prepositions	30	0	12	122	4.07	2.703
Pronoun	30	0	3	10	.33	.758
Total	30	8	54	768	25.60	11.328

Table 2: Error frequencies for Grade 12

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tenses	30	0	28	302	10.07	6.654
Concord	30	0	7	65	2.17	2.019
Article	30	0	7	89	2.97	1.974
Preposition	30	0	11	82	2.73	2.572
Pronoun	30	0	2	6	.20	.551
Total	30	1	45	544	18.13	10.769

Figure 1: Graphic presentation of error frequencies



4.1.2 Discussion of error frequencies

The results in Table 1, Table 2 and Figure 1 reveal the improvement in the performance of the Grade 12 learners, and would appear to reject both the central hypothesis and the five sub-hypotheses relating to the different errors. The implication of these results is that the additional two years exposure to the English language that the Grade 12s have had has stood them in good stead. It would appear that their language has improved measurably hence the difference of 224 errors in total, which is a 29.17% improvement over the Grade 10s.

The percentage improvements reflected in Table 5 (in 4.1.5) confirm the commonsense view that the improvements made by the Grade 12s look substantial. For example, the concord, pronouns and prepositions improved by 40.87%, 39.39% and 32.92% respectively.

However, the Grade 12s still commit many errors, as indicated by the range, which reflects variability between the lowest and highest frequencies. Table 1 indicates that the lowest and highest number of errors was 8 and 54 respectively in Grade 10, a range of 46. Table 2 indicates that the lowest and highest number

of errors was 1 and 45 respectively, giving a range of 44 in Grade 12. The fact that two students in Grade 12 only committed one error each out of 400 words attests to the superiority of the linguistic skills of these students. However, Grade 12 scores such as 40, 45 and 38 point to the poor quality of the language of some of the other students. The same pattern obtains among Grade 10 learners, where some students committed fewer errors (8, 9, 10, 11) while others committed many errors (35, 42, 48, 54).

These differences among students who are exposed to essentially the same input and demands in English suggest that a variable such as language aptitude makes some students less susceptible to fossilisation.

4.1.3 Measures of the statistical significance of differences

Table 3: Mann-Whitney U-test for the different errors

	Tenses	Concord	Articles	Preposit	Pronouns
Mann-Whitney U	323.500	315.000	354.000	297.500	419.000
Wilcoxon W	788.500	780.000	819.000	762.500	884.000
Z	-1.874	-2.022	-1.439	-2.280	-.707
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.061	.043	.150	.023	.480

Table 4: Mann-Whitney U-test for total errors

	Total
Mann-Whitney U	284.500
Wilcoxon W	749.500
Z	-2.449
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.014

4.1.4 Discussion of the statistical significance of differences between Grade 10 and Grade 12 errors

In order to determine the significance of the differences between the means of Grade 10 and 12 learners, non-parametric tests for independent samples were used. The Mann-Whitney U test (Tables 3 and 4 above) was used to test the null hypothesis that the two groups of learners display no statistically significant difference in tense errors. This test evaluates differences on outcome variables between two independent samples.

According to Sommer and Sommer (1986:220) a common practice is to use the 0,05 probability level for testing the null hypothesis. This is also called the 0,05 level of significance, abbreviated as $p < 0.05$. Table 4 reveals that the p-value (0.014) for total errors made is well below 0.05--the level required for a 95% degree of certainty that the difference between the two sets of students is significant. Table 3 shows that the p-value in respect of concords (0.043) and prepositions (0.023) is less than 0.05 which implies that the difference in errors made both groups is significant.

The p-value for tenses (0.061), articles (0.150) and pronouns (0.480) is greater than 0.05. Therefore, the difference between the Grade 12s and Grade 10s in respect of these three kinds of errors is not significant.

The results of the tests of statistical significance mean that the null-hypothesis is rejected in the case of total errors, concord and prepositions, but supported in the case of tenses, articles and pronouns.

4.1.5 The practical significance of the differences between Grade 10 and Grade 12 errors

Van der Walt (1994:11) argues as follows:

It is important to recognise that a statistically significant difference is just that, and no more. Significant differences simply indicate that we have concluded that the observed differences are due to other than chance factors. It does not indicate that the differences are necessarily interesting or meaningful.

Table 5: Percentage improvement and D—values

	Grade 10	Grade 12	Difference	% improvement	D Values
Tenses	13.5	10.07	3.43	25.41	0.49
Concord	3.67	2.17	1.5	40.87	0.57
Articles	4.03	2.97	1.06	26.30	0.44
Prepositions	4.07	2.73	1.34	32.92	0.50
Pronouns	0.33	0.20	0.13	39.39	0.19

In order to determine whether the statistically significant differences were also practically significant, that is, meaningful and with practical implications, the effect sizes (D-values) of the differences between the two groups of learners were calculated.

Cohen 1977 in Van der Walt (1994:11) recommends the following criteria when reporting (effect sizes) D-values:

- d = 0,2 small effect
- d = 0,5 medium effect
- d = 0,8 large effect

Using these criteria we can say that the two years between Grade 10 and Grade 12 had a medium effect on concord and prepositions. With a D-value of 0.49 the effect on tenses could be classified as medium, too. The intervening two years had a small effect on pronouns and articles.

4.2 An analysis of the errors themselves

4.2.1 Tense errors

Although the findings of this study confirm the hypothesis on tenses, the actual errors made by both groups of learners suggest that their interlanguage has stabilized to some extent and that certain of these interlanguage forms are potentially fossilisable. There is a remarkable degree of uniformity in the tense errors produced by both groups. The students seem to have a unique brand of interlanguage which

appears impervious to exposure to the English language.

The following examples of errors that have been extracted from the essays of the students reveal a common variety of errors and an interlanguage that seems to be founded on a set of rules unique to the interlanguage of the students. Indeed it is a common set of deviant rules. Clearly, the errors committed by the Grade 12 learners have not been eradicated by the additional two years exposure to English. The following examples of errors epitomise this state of affairs especially with regard to the use of the auxiliary:

***Use of auxiliary – (was) to form the past tense**

- | | |
|--|----------|
| (16) The car was collide with the bus | Grade 12 |
| (17) I was arrive early | Grade 12 |
| (18) The dog was bark us too much | Grade 10 |
| (19) I was come the ten o'clock | Grade 10 |

Examples (16), (17), (18) and (19) clearly reveal that the learners have neither mastered the rules regarding the formation of the past tense form on regular verbs by adding suffix **-ed** to the simple present tense nor the rule regarding the form that the past tense takes on irregular verbs. For them the past tense is formed by using the auxiliary **was**. It is difficult to account for this anomaly. In these examples, it would appear that the learners have adopted the approach that the auxiliary **was** is used before a verb to form the past tense without changing the form of the verb. Greenbaum and Mbalu (2002: 239) observe that Nguni speakers particularly seem to struggle with converting present tense verbs into the past tense which require them to add the suffix **-ed**. Makalela (1998:47) argues that learners of English who are not adequately exposed are likely to make non-standard errors in the past tense marker. There is, however, no relationship between the formation of the Xhosa past tense and the English past tense.

***Use of auxiliary (was, were) and past tense form of verb:**

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------|
| (20) I was visited my cousin. | Grade 12 |
| (21) Two people were died . | Grade 12 |
| (22) He was died . | Grade 10 |
| (23) I was came back | Grade 10 |

In examples (20), (21), (22) and (23) the students seem to have grasped the rule regarding the formation of the past tense form of verbs, but the tendency to include **was** or **were** before a verb appears to be

stubbornly persistent. This is a different pattern.

***Use of the past tense after the infinitive**

- | | |
|---|----------|
| (24) He asked the taxi to stopped | Grade 12 |
| (25) The players <i>were</i> went to bought food | Grade 12 |
| (26) The money was not enough to paid | Grade 10 |
| (27) I <i>was started</i> to went to Cape Town | Grade 10 |

Learners from both grades seem to have difficulty in using the correct tense of the verb that follows the infinitive. Examples (24), (25), (26) and (27) are evidence of a widespread tendency to use the past tense of the verb after the infinitive – to. Richards (1974:38) contends that students sometimes apply a rule in areas where it is incorrect or inappropriate. The students seem to understand the rule pertaining to the formation of the past tense but have generalised it to a situation where it is not appropriate. Referring to errors involving the infinitive, Finn (1996:5) states that students find difficulty in overcoming these errors, no matter how often this type of mistake is pointed out to them.

Students displayed a general tendency of not understanding the correct use of phrases like: **I'm supposed to' / 'We're supposed to' / I was supposed to'**. The following examples support this view:

***Use of "suppose to"**

- | | |
|---|----------|
| (28) We suppose to play *second match. | Grade 12 |
| (29) On that day we were suppose to go to Butterworth. | Grade 12 |
| (30) I suppose to wake up. | Grade 10 |
| (31) I was suppose to go to town | Grade 10 |

These errors are possibly due to the elision of the various forms of be in ordinary speech, for example, **I'm, you're, he's**. The students don't hear the contracted words. With regard to the examples given above, the students seemed to hear expressions like 'We're supposed to' and 'I'm supposed to' as 'We suppose to' and 'I suppose to' because that is how they sound. The students therefore fail to capture accurately the tense used and have had no access to the written form of the expressions.

**** Double signalling of the past tense**

- | | |
|--|----------|
| (32) The taxi did not arrived early | Grade 12 |
| (33) I did not enjoyed | Grade 12 |
| (34) My friend could not noticed . | Grade 10 |

(35) They **did not done** it.

Grade 10

Examples (32, (33), (34) and (35) reveal a tendency to signal the past tense twice in the verb itself (by adding –ed to regular verbs) even when it is signalled in the auxiliary (do/did) in negatives.

***Incorrect use of progressive tenses**

(36) He **was crossing** the robots while they were used. Grade 12

(37) My father **is going** to hospital to look mother in hospital. Grade 12

(38) When we **travelling** to Cape Town. Grade 10

(39) I will **building** homes. Grade 10

The context in which examples (36) and (37) were used in the essay “The day everything went wrong” suggests that the students ought to have used the simple past tense instead of the progressive tense. In example (38) the gerund is used without an accompanying auxiliary verb. Example (39) reveals the students’ lack of grasp of the correct form of the verb in future tenses. All these examples point to students’ tendency to use the progressive tenses incorrectly. The tendency to over-use the present continuous tense among English L₂ speakers is very common. Gamaroff (1986:105) observed that Tswana speakers over-use the present progressive. There is no relationship between the formation of the Xhosa progressive tense and its English counterpart. There is therefore no basis for any kind of transfer.

Bamgbose (1971:38) in Roodt (1993:101) also recorded the use of the present progressive tense in the speech of educated Nigerian speakers.

***Wrong formation of tense from irregular verbs**

(40) I **wearred** my clothes Grade 10

(41) I **waked** up early Grade 10

(42) The taxi **falled**. Grade 12

The above examples of erroneous past tense forms are a clear illustration of overgeneralization of target language rules. The students here have applied the rule regarding the use of **–ed /-d** in a situation where it is inappropriate. They extended the regular past tense marker – ed to verbs which are irregular. According to Makalela (1998:47) over-generalizing the regular past is common in English L₁ and L₂ acquisition.

It is clear from the examples discussed above that tense errors are a major problem in the language of the learners. The greater frequency of tense errors over others attests to this fact. The nature of the test administered to the students possibly contributed to the preponderance of these errors. The test (essays) required unconstrained writing (essay) rather than discrete - point - tests which would have tested the same number of items for each type of error. Students wrote sentences. All the sentences contain at least one verb, so there are more opportunities for tense errors than for others. Therefore tense errors are more frequent because the need to use them occurs more often.

The prevalence of tense errors also suggests that students experience the greatest difficulty in mastering the English system rules which govern the use of verbs.

It is clear, however, that the students vary widely in acquiring tenses despite their similar exposure to English. This could be attributed to a number of variables like language aptitude, higher intelligence, learning styles or because some students read more than others.

4.2.2 Concord errors

The myriad of concord errors committed by learners from both groups suggests that the concord is a problematic area in the language of the learners. The following examples can be highlighted:

- | | |
|---|----------|
| (43) He said takes all your clothes | Grade 10 |
| (44) My father go to his work <i>on</i> town | Grade 10 |
| (45) My lips was very big | Grade 10 |
| (46) The car that overtake us was collided | Grade 12 |
| (47) The traffics wants a license | Grade 12 |
| (48) She have nothing | Grade 12 |

These examples show that both groups of learners have yet to master the rules regarding subject verb agreement. The examples show the learners' incomplete mastery of the present tense form of the verb when used with a third person subject. The researcher experienced difficulty in deciding whether an error was a tense error or a concord error. For example, the correct verbs in respect of examples(44), (45), (46) and (47) are **went, were, overtook and wanted** because the context (narrative essay) in which these verbs were used required the use of the past tenses. However, the errors reveal the students' lack of grasp

of the concord rule that states that singular nouns are followed by a singular form of the verb and a plural is followed by the plural form of the verb. The researcher, therefore, classified these errors as both tense and concord errors.

Quirk (1995:757-758) suggests that erroneous structures with verb-subject agreement are common in the speech and writing of second language learners. Makalela (1998: 44) notes that the inappropriate use of agreement markers in Black South African English has been well documented in first and second language research. The subject-verb agreement errors of the students used in this study are proof that the learners' interlanguage has yet to develop to the target language level.

It is of interest to note that the concord errors made by the students show the greatest improvement (40.87) compared with others. Their improvement possibly points to the fact that some of these errors are developmental errors which students are likely to overcome. However, not all these errors can be eradicated by further exposure to English. Some of these errors will remain and will inevitably fossilise. Barnard (1995: 228) argues that fossilisation of interlanguage concord structures sets in during the early stages of English L₂ tuition.

The improvement made by the Grade 12 learners is indeed remarkable. However, it is possible that some of the students are likely to fossilise some of their interlanguage concord structures especially those that they have been using for many years.

4.2.3 Articles errors

The actual examples of errors on articles appear to reveal a unique pattern in the nature of the errors made. The pattern consists of the categories, namely, omission of articles, use of wrong article and use of unnecessary article.

***Omission of article**

(49) I will apply for *job	Grade 10
(50) I want to marry *educated woman	Grade 10
(51) I want to make my name famous in *Eastern Cape	Grade 10
(52) I caught *taxi at *bus stop	Grade 12
(53) We were going at *soccer tournament	Grade 12

The above examples which deal with the omission of both the definite and the indefinite article prove that articles are indeed problematic in the language of English L₂ speakers. This is possibly due to the fact there are no similar structures in the students' mother tongue, Xhosa. According to Buthelezi (1983:28), none of the black languages spoken in South Africa use the article system, hence it poses such formidable problems. The errors can possibly be explained in terms of the inherent complexity of the English use of articles. Students are probably struggling when dealing with articles because they cannot apply the rules regarding when to use a particular article. They are possibly unable to apply the rules because they cannot tell the difference between proper nouns and common nouns and the difference between countable nouns and uncountable nouns.

Selinker's view regarding the overgeneralization of target language (English) rules can be invoked to explain examples [51] and [54] **in*Eastern Cape and to*Eastern Cape Technikon**. The students omitted the articles as a result of analogies drawn from Standard English. They are over-generalizing the fact that most proper nouns do not take an article because English language rules explicitly state that no article is used before singular proper nouns.

***Use of wrong article**

- | | |
|---|----------|
| (55) I would like to give the computers to schools | Grade 10 |
| (56) He <i>use</i> to tell me a right thing | Grade 10 |
| (57) I am the matric student | Grade 12 |
| (58) It was the last day of a week | Grade 12 |

In examples (56), (57) and (58) learners inserted the indefinite article instead of the definite article and vice versa. Nagel (1993:77) found that the tendency to continue to make occasional article errors even in the case of near - native command of English appears to hold true for first-year students at the University of the North who made frequent errors in the use of articles.

***Use of unnecessary article**

- | | |
|---|----------|
| (59) I want to <i>has</i> a much money | Grade 10 |
| (60) I want to buy a furniture | Grade 10 |
| (61) I asked him to lend me a money | Grade 12 |
| (62) I broke the glass of a milk | Grade 12 |

Examples (59), (60), (61) and (62) confirm the difficulty L₂ learners encounter in learning the English article system. They struggle to understand that the indefinite article is not used with uncountable nouns. Nwaila (1996:97) also concurs with the views regarding the deviant usage of articles in black English L₂ because he says black languages do not use articles to signal definiteness or indefiniteness. Nwaila (1996:100) makes the following observation on article errors:

Fossilisation takes place if these errors are either not detected
or tolerated to recur with the hope that one day they would disappear.
Quite often they never disappear.

4.2.4 Prepositions errors

Second language speakers, like the students who are the subject of this study, struggle with prepositions because prepositions can have several meanings and several different prepositions can be used with the same meaning. The following errors prove that students have not mastered the art of learning prepositions in combination with the noun/verb/adjective they go with:

- | | |
|---|----------|
| (63) My brother shall go to P.E. for learn | Grade 10 |
| 64) It was on November 2000 | Grade 10 |
| (65) The bus did not come on nine o'clock | Grade 10 |
| (66) In he way to Butterworth the drive was driven under the influence of liquor | Grade 12 |
| (67) It was in 20 January 2002. | Grade 12 |
| (68) I returned with a high speed | Grade 12 |
| (69) It was* Wednesday. | Grade 12 |

Roodt (1994:99) argues that prepositions are sometimes omitted in instances where they are required. The researcher picked up only one such error in Grade 12 (69) **It was* Wednesday**.

Finn 1996:5) contends that prepositions are a problem not only to those speaking English as a second language. Lack of contact with the English language as well as reliance on the first language for the correct proposition is a cause of preposition errors. Ngara (1983:37-38) argues that most errors are a result of incomplete learning which is caused by the fact that the second language speaker half-learned a structure, a word or an expression or any other feature of the target language that is only partially correct. Ngara reasons that preposition errors occur because learners confuse them because of expressions they were

exposed to and forget the prepositions that go with those expressions. Examples (64) and (67) which refer to months of the year must be particularly confusing and exacting to the L₂ learners who must understand that the correct answers are “**in November 2003**” and “**on 20 January 2002**”. Students might have heard their teachers using expressions like “on time” and “on cloud nine” and to them there is nothing wrong with saying “on nine o’clock”.

4.2.5 Pronoun errors

The extremely small number of pronoun errors makes it difficult to make any worthwhile conclusions on these errors. Most students approached the essays from the point of view of the first person. This probably resulted in few gender pronoun errors involving he/she/him/her.

The few errors made suggested a tendency to use both the noun and the pronoun. This is a direct translation of a common phenomenon in the Xhosa language. The following examples typify this:

(70) me and my wife **we** shall keep our money in the bank.

(71) my sister **she** was crying so much.

The following example: (72)**she says I wanted money** demonstrates the student’s failure to change the first person pronoun (I) to the third person (she) in reported speech.

There was absolutely no evidence of the tendency among L₂ speakers to fail to distinguish between the masculine and the feminine **he** and **she**. The tendency for most students to write their essays in the first person may account in part for this.

Roos (1990:91) ascribes errors in the use of pronouns to interference from the first language. Example (71) is a direct transfer of the Xhosa language use of both the noun and the pronoun.

4.3 Correlation analysis

Correlations were computed to establish the measure of the strength and direction of the relationships between the different aspects of grammar. These correlations yield information concerning the degree of this relationship and “estimate the extent to which the changes in one variable are associated with changes

in another variable" (Welman & Kruger 1994:2000).

The findings of this study reveal the extent of errors made by the subjects. It is of major interest, however, to establish the extent of the relationships between the different types of errors. Is a student who is bad/good in tenses also bad/good in concord? Is there a significant relationship between errors on articles and errors on prepositions? If there is a relationship, what is the extent of this relationship, and what causes it? There are some of the questions that need answers.

Spearman's correlation coefficient is used as an indicator of the relationship between the various variables of this study. The coefficient summarises what can be observed from the scatter diagrams provided to give a graphic representation of the relationship achieved. Welman and Kruger (1994:210) have this to say about correlations:

A positive correlation reflects a direct relationship – one in which an increase in one variable corresponds to an increase in the other variable.

Two variables that are directly or inversely related would produce a negative correlation – indicating that an increase in one variable is associated with a decrease in the other.

These correlations have been interpreted in terms of Mulder's (1989:73) criteria for the interpretation of the correlation coefficient which are reproduced below:

1,00	-	perfect correlation
0,80 to 0,99	-	very high correlation
0,60 to 0,79	-	high correlation
0,40 to 0,59	-	moderate correlation
0,20 to 0,39	-	low correlation
0,01 to 0,19	-	very low correlation

The results of correlation analysis

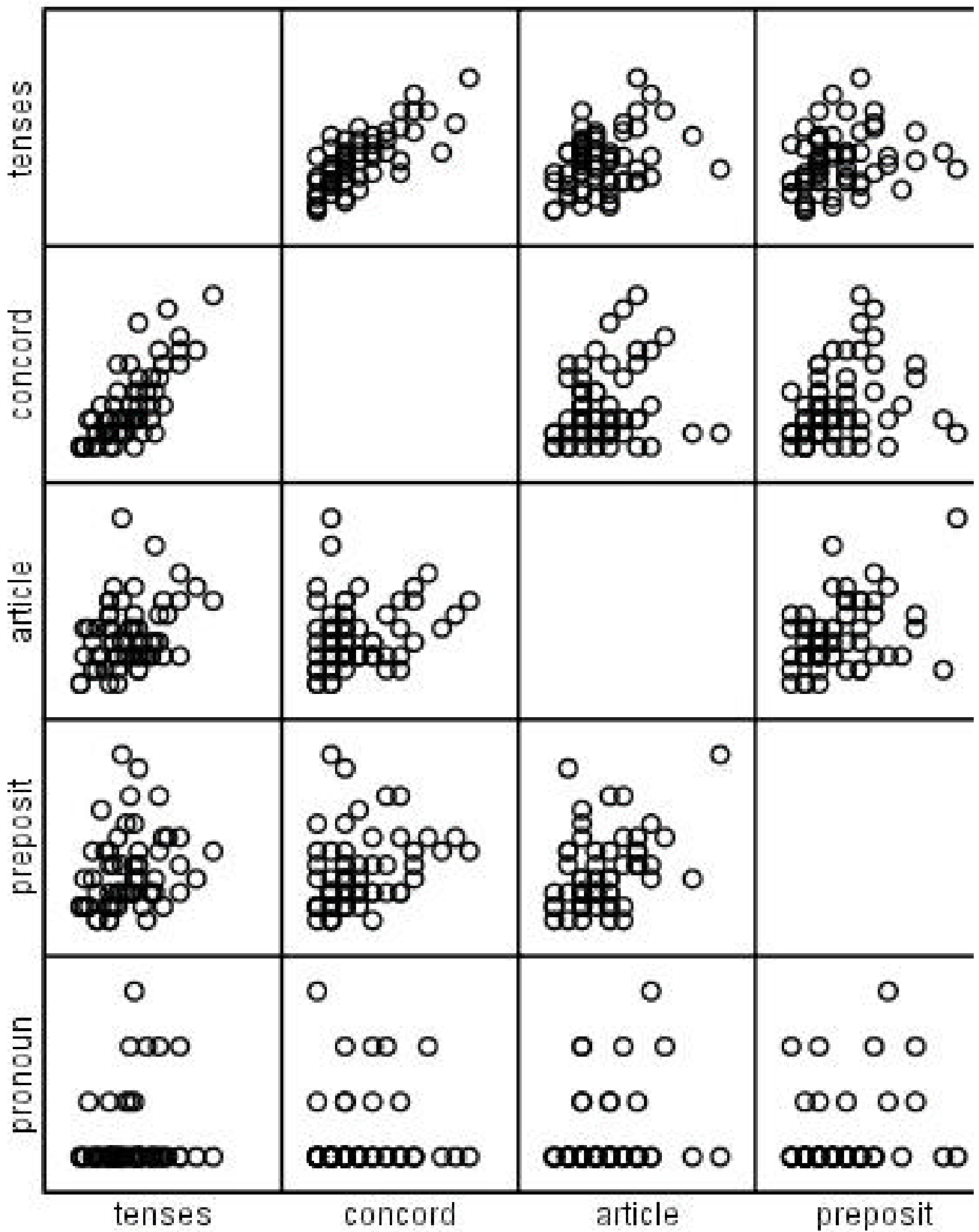
Combined correlations for Grade 10 and Grade 12

Table 6 below presents Spearman's correlation coefficients for the relationship between the different categories of errors committed by the combined two groups of Grade 10 and 12 students (60 learners). Figure 2 presents a graphic illustration of these correlations.

Table 6: Correlations for Grade 10 and 12

Correlations							
			tenses	concord	article	preposit	pronoun
		Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.730(**)	.288(*)	.322(*)	.108
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.026	.012	.412
		N	60	60	60	60	60
		Correlation Coefficient	.730(**)	1.000	.208	.388(**)	.094
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.111	.002	.477
		N	60	60	60	60	60
		Correlation Coefficient	.288(*)	.208	1.000	.358(**)	.163
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.026	.111	.	.005	.214
		N	60	60	60	60	60
		Correlation Coefficient	.322(*)	.388(**)	.358(**)	1.000	.184
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	.002	.005	.	.160
		N	60	60	60	60	60
	Correlation Coefficient	.108	.094	.163	.184	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.412	.477	.214	.160	.	
	N	60	60	60	60	60	
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).							
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).							

Fig 2: Scatter diagrams for Grade 10 and Grade 12



**** Significance with 99% confidence**

The correlation coefficient for the correlation between tenses and concord is 0,730 (high correlation)

The correlation coefficient for the correlation between concord and prepositions is 0,388 (low correlation)

The correlation coefficient for the correlation between articles and prepositions is 0,358 (low correlation)

Significance with 95% confidence

The correlation coefficient for the correlation between tenses and prepositions is 0,322 (low correlation)

The correlation coefficient for the correlation between tenses and articles is 0,288 (low correlation).

It is clear from the correlation results presented that the salient correlations in this study are those with a significance level of 95% and 99% confidence. Macmillan and Schumacher (1993: 279) argue that correlations as low as 0,30 or 0,40 are useful. Therefore, only correlations in the range of 0,30 and above are discussed.

The high correlation (0,730) between tense errors and concord errors can be explained by the fact that both tenses and concord occur in relation to verbs. This indicates students' problems with controlling verbs. This simply means that if students do not know how to use the correct tense of a verb, they are highly likely to have a problem with subject-verb-agreement. There is also a high probability that a student who is good/bad in tenses is also good/bad in concord. The narrative essay that was given to the learners probably limited the number of concord errors as students had to essentially use the past tenses, which are not inflected for number.

The low correlation (0,388) between concord and prepositions suggests that there is not a significant relationship between these two variables.

The low correlation (0,358) between articles and prepositions indicates that the relationship between the two is insignificant. The problem with regard to the use of articles and prepositions is possibly just a result of a student's poor grasp of the English language in general.

The low correlation (0,322) between tenses and prepositions shows the insignificance of the relationship

between the two. The difficulty that students have in using tenses and prepositions has probably to do with student's general poor proficiency in tenses and the fact that prepositions are problematic among all speakers of English, including native speakers.

Indeed, even the correlations below 0,30 show a direct positive relationship between various categories of errors – albeit with insignificant correlation coefficients. Students' proficiency or lack thereof in one aspect bears a close relationship with another.

4.4 Concluding interpretation and discussion of findings

The main findings reached in this study in respect of error fossilisation relate to the central hypothesis, which refers to the statistical significance of the difference in overall errors between the two groups of subjects. The other findings relate to the five sub-hypotheses that refer to the statistical significance of the differences in tenses, concord, articles, prepositions and pronouns. The findings reached suggest that Grade 12 students consistently make fewer errors than Grade 10 students.

Regarding the total errors made by both groups of learners, it is worth mentioning that the five types of errors influence the total unequally in the sense that the learners committed a different number of errors for each category. The difference of 224 errors between the Grade 10's (768 errors) and Grade 12s (544) is indeed substantial. In fact, the Grade 12s made a 29, 17% overall improvement over the Grade 10s.

If we assume that the two groups are in all respects equivalent, then the statistical data in Table 1 and Table 2 (in 4.1.1) clearly confirm the benefits of the two years of tuition that the Grade 12s had. The data unequivocally show the superiority of this class in all the different categories of errors. The Grade 10s made a total of 405 tense errors as opposed to 302 for the Grade 12s. Indeed, tenses seem to be the most problematic aspect in the language of learners because they contributed more than half of the total errors made by both groups.

The substantially big difference between the two sets of total errors is confirmed by the results of the test of statistical significance of their difference. The p-value at 0,014 is significant. When compared with the difference for concord (0,043) and prepositions (0,023) this figure is actually the lowest.

However, it is interesting to note that the contribution of the concord (110 errors) and prepositions (122 errors) to the total number of errors (768) in Grade 10 is weaker than that of tenses (405 errors). The contribution of concord (65 errors) and prepositions (82 errors) to the total (544) is also substantially lower than that of tenses (302). Despite this, the difference between the totals is more statistically significant than any of the types on its own.

It is worth noting that the p-value for tenses (0,061) is only just outside the 95% level. Pronouns with a p-value of 0,480 make a really low contribution to the total, 10 errors in 768 in Grade 10 and only 6 errors in 544 in Grade 12.

Although the results differ in terms of statistical significance, the results of the practical significance of the differences between the scores of Grade 10s and Grade 12s indicate that the differences were of medium practical significance in the case of all types of errors except pronouns. This means that the language tuition provided in Grade 10 and Grade 11 was meaningful and had a positive effect on the language behaviour of students.

The aim of this study was to determine the extent of error fossilisation in the language of senior secondary students. According to the findings, it appears as if many structures have fossilised in the language of the students used in this study.

The results presented above clearly reveal that second language learners struggle to express themselves in impeccable English. They consistently use erroneous and deviant interlanguage structures which are more or less similar to those found in the work of other second language researchers. Since it was not the aim of this study to identify the causes of language errors, it is not possible to explain what the source of each error is. It is possible, however, that most of the errors committed by the learners are the result of the influence of their mother tongue. The learners transfer patterns from their own language or overextend patterns of the target language.

The errors made by the learners used in this study appear to epitomise an interlanguage that bears features of Black South African English (B.S.A.E.).

The language produced can be attributed to various factors. It could be a result of insufficient quality and

quantity of input from their teachers. Krashen (1995:43) states that insufficient input causes fossilisation. Students who do not reside in the country where the language is spoken and who have little access to native speakers or to books in the target language and other material resources often become victims of fossilisation. Indeed the learners fit these criteria. This makes them good candidates for fossilisation. Ngara (1983: 38) argues that some errors committed by L₂ learners are a result of incomplete learning which happens when learners half-learn a structure.

Barnard (1995:6) found that interlanguage structures are retained in the second language of teacher trainees who eventually re-enter the school system as teachers with grammatically limited English L₂ proficiency. "If ESL grammatical proficiency of teachers is low they may contribute to the occurrence of fossilised structures and consequent low grammatical proficiency in the ESL of their pupils". The learners used in the study are victims of an interlanguage legacy bequeathed to them by their second language teachers. Thus the presence of fossilised structures in their teachers' language production has limited their verbalisation of English concepts. Therefore the limited English proficiency of teachers is an obstacle to the pupils' language proficiency.

The errors made by the learners display an identifiable pattern that leads one to conclude that the errors are systematic and may therefore fossilise. My research therefore set out to establish whether the selected errors had only temporarily stabilized or whether the students had in fact reached a plateau beyond which they could not progress - permanent fossilisation.

The findings exemplified by the errors indicate that students differ in their susceptibility to fossilisation :assuming equivalence in the composition of the two groups , the general reduction in errors over two years conceals the contrast between the excellent progress certain students can be assumed to have made in that time and the lack of progress by others.

Selinker (1992:258) argues that fossilised interlanguage structures are interlanguage structures, rules or features which have been part of the learners' linguistic repertoire for at least five years. The subjects of this study have been doing English as a subject from Grade 1 and English as a language of learning and teaching from Grade 3. Despite this very long period of exposure to English, interlanguage forms continue to dominate the language of the students. It would be quite correct to suggest that the student's language behaviour will change and they will improve their language because they will continue to learn English

inside and outside the classroom. Interlanguage change will inevitably result. However, it is also correct to say that certain features of the students' language behaviour will experience non-change, that is, they will fossilise. The question regarding which aspects will fossilise is a moot one.

The Grade 10s and 12s are in their eighth and tenth year of English as a medium of instruction respectively. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the students are highly unlikely to eradicate entirely the erroneous interlanguage features.

The interlanguage of the learners reveals that they have created their own imperfect system of rules which they use as a legitimate language of some sort. Their language is one of a special kind with a special grammar. Many factors, namely, over-generalisation, misapplication of rules, negative transfer and poor or inappropriate teaching have contributed to this state of affairs.

It is clear that the structures selected for this research are resistant to remedial strategies and are therefore retained in most students' language however much they are exposed to the target language. Interventions made by the teachers across the various grades over the years seem to have had little impact on the language of the majority of students.

Although the study unequivocally reveals that errors in the use of tenses, concord, articles, prepositions and to a lesser extent pronouns have fossilised in the English of the students, it would be simplistic to regard fossilisation as final. These features of students' language have stabilised or temporarily fossilised and will therefore destabilise when the right conditions prevail – more so for some students than for others. Some learners will gradually change their imperfect interlanguage structures to approximate the structure of the target language until their language merges with the target language system.

Findings by researchers cited in this study provided evidence of fossilisation among different second language learners at different levels. The evidence of fossilisation exemplified in this study reinforces the conviction of the researcher that some of the interlanguage structures in the language of Xhosa speaking-English second language learners are manifestations of error fossilisation.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

This concluding chapter provides a brief overview of the entire study. It summarises the major findings of the study. It examines the contribution made by this study and specifically looks at how the study contributes to the understanding of error *fossilisation* within the context of Xhosa speaking students of English in the FET band. Finally, it discusses the limitations and the practical implications of the study and makes suggestions for possible further research in the field.

5.1 Review

The aim of this study was to investigate error fossilisation as it manifests itself in the written language of high school students. The researcher was concerned about the persistence of errors in the written language of students. Chapter 1 identified the need for this type of study, which was prompted by the realisation that English L₂ students produce recurring errors in their written language. These errors, namely, tenses, concord, prepositions, articles and to some extent pronouns are highly resistant to correction and continue to prevail in the language of learners in spite of interventions made by teachers in English classes and the fact that English is also used as a medium of instruction in four other subjects.

The study was specifically conducted to determine whether certain errors in the language of two groups of students have fossilised. This was done by making a frequency count of errors made by Grade 10 and Grade 12 students and comparing the extent of these errors. In order to realise the aim of this study, the following main hypothesis was formulated:

Hypothesis

- ❖ There is no statistically significant difference in the overall frequency of errors of Grade 10 and Grade 12 despite the additional two years exposure (by the Grade 12s) to Standard English in various forms across the curriculum and to explicit language teaching provided in English classes.

The above hypothesis generated five sub-hypotheses which pertained to five kinds of errors, namely, tenses, concord, articles, prepositions, and pronouns. The hypothesis for each kind of error was formulated as follows:

- ❖ There is no statistically significant difference in the frequency of tense/ concord/ article/ preposition/pronoun errors of Grade 10 and Grade 12 learners despite the fact that the Grade 12 learners have had two years additional exposure to Standard English in various forms across the curriculum and to explicit language teaching in English classes.

Chapter 2 dealt with various findings of other researchers on the interlanguage hypothesis and fossilisation. The literature review revealed that interlanguage is a language peculiar to a second language speaker and can stabilise (temporarily) or fossilise (permanently) when a learner's language proficiency reaches a plateau beyond which further progress does not occur. Other theorists contend that both stabilisation and fossilisation are not necessarily final and that certain errors can be destabilised and defossilised. Various causes of fossilisation were presented and most seem to apply to the learners who are the focus of this study.

Chapter 3 dealt with the research methodology used in this study. Two essays of 200 words each were given to each of the 60 sampled subjects from Grade 10 and 12. The focus was on the frequency count of five kinds of errors, namely, tenses, concord, articles, prepositions and pronouns, made by Grade 10 and

Grade 12 students. The errors were computed so that the means give an overall impression of errors made. A correlations exercise was done to establish the strength and direction of the relationship between the various categories of errors.

Chapter 4 dealt with the findings of the study which were reached by testing the main hypothesis and the sub-hypotheses. The findings are also interpreted and discussed in relation to literature on interlanguage and fossilisation.

5.1.1 Summary of major findings

The findings with regards to the hypotheses are summarised as follows:

With regards to the central hypothesis, the findings reveal a general improvement in the performance of Grade 12 learners compared to the Grade 10s. The Grade 12s consistently made fewer errors. Consequently, the difference between the total errors of the two sets of learners was statistically significant. The findings, therefore, reject the main hypothesis.

The findings regarding tense, article and pronoun errors support the hypotheses because there were no significant differences between the two groups of learners.

The findings regarding tense, article and pronoun errors support the hypotheses because there were no significant differences between the two groups of learners.

The findings pertaining to concord and preposition errors reject the hypotheses because there were statistically significant differences in the errors made by the two groups.

It is significant to note that only two kinds of errors, namely, concord and prepositions showed statistically significant differences.

The findings, as exemplified in the actual examples made, clearly reveal that certain errors are stubborn and can be considered to have fossilised or as being potentially fossilisable.

5.1.2 Contribution of the study

The contributions of this study are essentially pedagogic. Generally speaking, the study contributed towards a better understanding of the phenomenon of fossilisation, particularly at high school level.

The findings of the study highlighted common erroneous features in the written English of L₂ students. Thus, the study could help teachers gain an insight into what they need to pay attention to when teaching L₂ learners so that they can easily guide students to produce fewer written errors. There is no doubt that special remedial teaching strategies are needed to address the problem of low grammatical levels among learners and to arrest the perpetuation of specific errors. Such strategies can help internalise and stabilise correct language structures at an early stage.

The implication of the results derived from the hypotheses of the study is that teacher interventions promote the development of the L₂ - hence the overall superiority of the Grade 12s.

5.1.3 Limitations of the study

This study does not claim to be extensive or comprehensive. Although the findings of the study are based on a sample of students of a given socio-economic status in a rural school, there is reason to believe that many of the interlanguage structures and features in these students' language are common in the English of Xhosa mother-tongue speakers in particular and English second language students in general. Therefore, the researcher believes that the findings of the study are generalisable even though the study was conducted in one school.

It may, however, be questionable whether the sample selected can be regarded as being fully representative of the classes from which it was chosen. A larger sample would presumably have yielded a greater diversity of errors and there is the possibility that findings derived from such a group could have been more statistically valid. Others could argue that the Grade 12 sample was selected from a population of good students because the bad ones were eliminated from the school system through dropouts and failures. The researcher, however, believes that the sample was typical of the Grade 10s and Grade 12s he has taught over the past few years, and that neither of the two groups struck their teachers as being

either stronger or weaker than the other.

It could be argued that a longitudinal study which uses the same group of learners from Grade 10 until they reach Grade 12 could more accurately monitor the language development of individual learners and demonstrate the impact of teacher interventions on their language. It would eliminate the variable of comparing different learners. In addition, the differentiation in both groups of learners suggests that fossilised forms are not necessarily a group phenomena, and that individuals may develop different kinds of fossilised forms. Analysing their responses by means and t-tests obscures the individuality of each subject's response and yields only generalisations. It is arguable that a qualitative analysis of responses to focused discourse-elicitation tasks might have been more appropriate.

This research might be criticised for focussing on errors that came up naturally in student writing instead of constraining the students with discrete-point items which purport to measure their control of the various points of grammar. The nature of the task given to students, that is, essays, did not constrain students to use certain aspects of grammar. Instead, it allowed students to write spontaneously and produce the kinds of errors that occur naturally in their writing. The types of essays set may have limited the scope and extent of errors committed.

The test is open to error-avoidance: in writing their essays, some learners may well be sophisticated enough to avoid their known or suspected points of weakness. This data-collection process therefore cannot claim to have covered the universum of lexico-syntactic features of learners' interlanguages.

As the researcher was the sole judge of errors, it could be argued that a more meticulous process of validation should have been used. This would have involved setting up operational definitions of the constructs to be analysed, training several different raters to apply them in the same way, cross-validating the data and calculating inter-rater reliability. This would have yielded a reliability index to support the findings.

5.2 Implications for classroom teaching

A few comments, observations and recommendations for classroom practice can be made:

- ❖ English L₂ teachers should pay more attention to the teaching of writing to assist students to

- develop skills in producing standard language.
- ❖ Teachers need to compile a list of fossilised interlanguage structures and then provide remedial feedback which should focus students' attention on these structures.
 - ❖ Teachers can also adopt the consciousness-raising approach to the teaching of grammar in which instruction in grammar (through drills, grammar instruction and other form-focussed activities) is viewed as a way of raising learners' awareness of grammatical features of the language.
 - ❖ Teachers should give students maximum exposure to correct forms of the English language in the classroom especially because L₂ students' access to English is limited to the classroom environment. This means that teachers should be good models to students. Teachers must also motivate students to listen to English programmes on the radio, to watch English language television programmes and to read English newspapers and magazines. Students also need to read slightly challenging prose. This will facilitate L₂ acquisition.
 - ❖ Teachers need to use the integrated approach to language teaching by focussing on the four language skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing.
 - ❖ Teachers should upgrade their own qualifications in English and avail themselves of in-service training by qualified subject specialists.

5.3 Implications for further research

- ❖ Further research on what teachers are actually doing in their classrooms vis-à-vis what the syllabus requires is worthy of investigation.
- ❖ A longitudinal study on error fossilisation is highly recommended.
- ❖ Error fossilisation by other L₂ speakers other than Xhosa mother tongue speakers needs to be researched.

- ❖ Other types of language errors should be included in research on error fossilisation.
- ❖ There is also the need for research on how fossilisation can be reversed.

5.4 Conclusion

The research findings of this study, even though it is derived from a sample taken from one school, have led the researcher to conclude that:

- ❖ Grade 12 students consistently make fewer errors than Grade 10 students. They have clearly benefited from the additional two years exposure to English as a subject and medium of instruction.
- ❖ The language of the students shows evidence of error fossilisation. This is inevitable in an environment where English is virtually a foreign language.

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