

# Emerging Practices in Language, Literature & Soft Skills



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## Table of Contents

S. No.	Author (s)	Chapter	Page No.
1.	Dr. Monika Duggal	Engineering Empathy: A Comparative Study of Technical vs. Interdisciplinary Classrooms through Literary Narratives	1-11
2.	Dr. Amit Yograj Kapoor	Digital Humanities: Transforming the Literary Landscape	12-20
3.	Dr. Twinkle Dasari	The Spectrum of Marginalization: Interpreting Transgender Experiences in India through the lens of Kalki's 'We Are Not The Others'	21-30
4.	Gayathri B	From Silence to the Second Bloom: Menopause, Bodily Autonomy, and Liberation in Alice Walker's <i>The Color Purple</i>	31-38
5.	K. Jyothi Rani	Tools and Techniques for Students' Engagement	39-43
6.	Kritika	Home, Hearts and Healing: Understanding Emotional Growth through Realistic Fiction for Children	44-50
7.	Sikha Nandakumar	'This Barbie Is Not Real!': Greta Gerwig's Barbie as Post Modern Performance and Consumer Myth	51-57
8.	Yashavantha M P	Films and Literature: A Symbiotic Cultural Dialogue	58-63
9.	Harsha.V <sup>1</sup> , Dr. M.N.V. Preya <sup>2</sup>	The Unspoken and the Unseen: A Multimodal Analysis of Emotional Subtext in Cross-Cultural Short Fiction	64-70
10.	Pooja S Ajith	Mystery of the East: Echoes of Orientalism in Selected Short Stories by Agatha Christie	71-78
11.	Dechen Wangmo	Eco Literature as a Pedagogical Tool: Bridging Language, Ethics, and Empathy	79-90

12.	S. Mubeena Tabassum	The Vision of Gender Identity in Githa Hariharan's novel <i>The Thousand Faces of Night</i> and Anita Nair's <i>Ladies Coupe</i>	91-99
13.	Chitra V R	A Comparative Study of the Representation of Trauma and Suicide in the Malayalam movies <i>Kadhavasheshan</i> and <i>Utharam</i>	100-107
14.	Dr. Kapila Vishwasrao Mhaisane	Voices of Resistance: The Evolution of Feminist Thought in Literature	108-115
15.	Sini K A <sup>1</sup> , Dr. P. Suria Thilagam <sup>2</sup>	Grammar and Vocabulary Accuracy in Spoken English Among Regional Language Higher Secondary Students: A Theoretical and Empirical Study	116-127
16.	Indrani Sengupta	Colonial Legacies and the Silencing of Storytellers: Indigenous Literary Forms and the Human Rights Gap	128-139
17.	Usharani <sup>1</sup> , Dr. P. Suria Thilagam <sup>2</sup>	Alienation and Identity Crisis in William Gibson's <i>Neuromancer</i> : A Cyberpunk Exploration of the Posthuman Self	140-148
18.	Dr. R. Abeetha <sup>1</sup> , Dr. A. A. Jayashree Prabhakar <sup>2</sup>	Unveiling the Shadows: The Mystery of Dual Identity in Stevenson's <i>Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</i>	149-157
19.	A. H. Parvin	Sweetness and Subjugation: Gendered Labour, Patriarchal Economy, and The Exploitation of Women's Bodies in <i>Saudagar</i> (1973)	158-172
20.	Dr. Nareshkumar A. Parmar	Unveiling Cultural Traditions and Moral Wisdom: A Deep Dive into Sudha Murthy's Children's Short Stories	173-182
21.	Garima Oberoi	Gender, Memory and The Spatial Legacies of Slavery: A Digital Humanities Approach to Yaa Gyasi's <i>Homegoing</i> and Solomon Northup's <i>12 Years A Slave</i>	183-193

22.	Bharath G C	Indian English Detective Fiction: Themes, Evolution, and Cultural Contexts	194-197
23.	Dr. Yagani Haribabu	Language Skills -Centered Education	198-203
24.	Dr. K. Shaheen	AI and Soft Skills Integration in Business Communication: A Strategic Perspective	204-210
25.	Dr. P. Basheer Khan	Bridging the Gap Between Academia and Industry: English Language Teaching as a Tool for Employability Enhancement	211-220

# GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY ACCURACY IN SPOKEN ENGLISH AMONG REGIONAL LANGUAGE HIGHER SECONDARY STUDENTS: A THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL STUDY

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## Abstract

Mastering English speaking skills pivots on a solid understanding of grammar and vocabulary, which is especially vital for higher secondary students who have been educated in regional languages. In India, a country teeming with linguistic diversity, students from backgrounds like Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada often encounter unique hurdles when they switch to English for their academic and everyday communication. This paper renders a theoretical and empirical analysis of the difficulties faced by the regional learners, focusing on their grammatical and lexical accuracy. Based on classroom experiences, reviewing relevant literature, and examining theories of second language acquisition, the study investigates how factors like first language interference, limited vocabulary exposure, and performance anxiety lead to errors in spoken English. Further, it proposes teaching strategies such

as context-driven grammar exercises, theme-oriented vocabulary lessons, and the integration of digital resources to boost accuracy.

A research framework that consists of diagnostic assessments, mixed-method interventions, and both qualitative and quantitative evaluations is suggested for future studies. Ultimately, this paper seeks to lay the groundwork for further empirical research and curriculum enhancements aimed at improving spoken English skills among students from regional language backgrounds.

**Keywords:** Grammar Accuracy, Vocabulary Development, Regional Language Learners, Second Language Acquisition, Language Pedagogy

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background and Rationale

In today's interconnected world, being skilled in English is increasingly observed as a vital asset for academic success, career opportunities, and effective communication. While written English has traditionally taken centre stage in Indian education, there's a growing recognition that speaking skills—especially the ability to communicate accurately in English—are just as important. As Thornbury emphasizes, “accuracy does matter, particularly in public, formal, and academic speaking situations” (How to Teach Speaking 36). Unfortunately, in many schools where regional languages like Malayalam, Kannada, or Bengali are the medium of instruction, students often have limited opportunities to hear and practice authentic spoken English, which can hinder their communication skills. “Learners need opportunities not just to learn about language, but to use it meaningfully and interactively,” argue Richards and Renandya, reinforcing the need to shift focus from rote learning to real usage (Methodology in Language Teaching 3). This issue becomes particularly critical during the higher secondary phase, a crucial time that shapes students' career paths and access to higher education. Krashen's Input

Hypothesis further underlines this issue, stating that “language is acquired in only one way—by exposure to comprehensible input” (Principles and Practice 20). Unfortunately, many regional learners are not exposed to adequate listening or speaking input, making this acquisition process harder. Students who have been educated in their regional languages up to this point suddenly find themselves expected to thrive in an English-centric academic environment, which may require them to give presentations, take part in interviews, engage in group discussions, and more.

Language learning, especially speaking, relies on both accuracy and fluency. Fluency is about how effortlessly a speaker can express themselves, while accuracy pertains to the correctness of grammar and vocabulary. This paper focuses on the issue of accuracy, aiming to pinpoint the challenges that prevent students from achieving grammatical and lexical correctness and exploring ways to enhance these skills through informed teaching practices.

## 1.2 Significance of the Study

This study holds significant importance by shedding light on the unique challenges the learners encounter and pinpointing effective teaching strategies, educators and curriculum developers can create more inclusive and impactful language programs. Additionally, this research adds to the broader field of English Language Teaching (ELT) by examining the connections between second language acquisition theories, classroom observations, and practical teaching methods tailored to local contexts.

Swain emphasizes that language development is not solely about comprehension but also about production: “It is through speaking that learners realize what they do not know, which helps them to reorganize their knowledge” (Swain 249). This study is relevant, as it responds to the growing need for research that tackles the specific challenges faced by Indian learners in mastering spoken English.

## 1.1 Objectives of the Study

- To explore the significance of accuracy in grammar and vocabulary for spoken English.
- To identify common grammatical and lexical challenges faced by higher secondary students from regional language backgrounds.
- To propose pedagogical strategies rooted in theory that can improve accuracy in spoken English.
- To establish a research framework based on diagnostics and interventions for future application.

## 2. Understanding the Subskill: Accuracy in Grammar and Vocabulary

### 2.1 What is Accuracy?

As Thornbury defines, “accuracy concerns the extent to which a learner’s use of language conforms to the target language norms” (How to Teach Speaking 20). In spoken English, grammatical accuracy means using tenses, articles, prepositions, subject-verb agreement and word order correctly. On the other hand, lexical accuracy is about picking the right words for the situation, which includes collocations, idiomatic phrases, and the nuances of meaning. For example, if a student says, “He go to school yesterday,” that’s a grammatical slip regarding tense. Meanwhile, saying “big pain” instead of “severe pain” is a vocabulary misstep. According to Nation, “vocabulary use is crucial to communicative competence and to successful communication in a second language” (Learning Vocabulary 2). Thus, both grammatical and lexical accuracy are foundational to successful spoken interaction.

## 2.2 Importance of Grammar and Vocabulary Accuracy in Speaking

As Canale and Swain assert, grammatical competence is “one of the most important components of communicative competence” and is essential for constructing meaningful utterances in a second language (5). In educational environments, the need for accurate grammar and vocabulary becomes even more critical, particularly when students are discussing topics, clarifying ideas, or presenting their thoughts. Thornbury also highlights the long-term importance of developing accuracy early in language instruction: “Fluency can mask a lack of accuracy. Over time, this fossilization of errors becomes harder to correct” (How to Teach Speaking 36).

## 3. Observed Challenges in Regional Medium Learners

Students who are learning in regional language mediums encounter a distinct linguistic journey compared to their counterparts in English medium schools. By the time they reach higher secondary education, they suddenly find themselves needing to demonstrate a high level of spoken English proficiency, especially in competitive situations like exams, interviews, and public speaking events. As Richards and Renandya point out, “many learners fail to develop spoken fluency and accuracy because they have had little opportunity for actual language use in meaningful interaction” (Methodology in Language Teaching 121).

### 3.1 First Language (L1) Interference

One of the prevalent hurdles for learners from regional language backgrounds is the interference from their first language. This occurs when they unintentionally apply phonological, grammatical, or lexical rules from their native language while speaking English. For instance, in Malayalam, the sentence structure usually follows a Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) order, whereas English uses a Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) format. This fundamental difference can lead to mistakes, such as saying “He

instead of "He wrote a letter." Selinker refers to this phenomenon as "transfer," a core feature of interlanguage, which he describes as a "unique system resulting from the learner's attempt to produce the target language structures" (Selinker 215). Moreover, certain grammatical features in English—like articles, auxiliary verbs, or specific tense forms—might not exist in the learners' native languages, resulting in omissions or incorrect usage.

### 3.1.1 Limited Lexical Range

Learners from regional language backgrounds often depend on a limited set of words and phrases. This limited exposure leads to the repetitive use of basic words like "good," "nice," or "big," rather than opting for more precise alternatives like "delicious," "pleasant," or "significant."

Nation emphasizes that "vocabulary size is the single most significant factor in reading and speaking proficiency," and that limited vocabulary "restricts learners' ability to express themselves with clarity" (Learning Vocabulary 29). Furthermore, as Nation notes, "learners acquire vocabulary and grammar when they understand language input that contains these features in a comprehensible way" (Principles and Practice 21). In regional schools, such input is often missing due to the academic rather than communicative use of English.

### 3.1.2 Inadequate Practice of Spoken Grammar

In schools where regional languages are the medium of instruction, grammar lessons usually focus on written exercises, memorizing rules, and correcting writing errors, rather than weaving grammar into spoken language. Thornbury asserts that "knowing a grammar rule is not the same as being able to use it in real-time communication" (How to Teach Speaking 44). For instance, a student could correctly write "He has gone to the bank" with "has gone" in a written assignment but might say "He gone to

school" when speaking. Speaking requires quick thinking, and without enough practice, students find it hard to internalize these grammatical structures.

### 3.4 Performance Anxiety and Inhibition

Krashen argues that "a low affective filter facilitates language acquisition," meaning that anxiety and fear can block the input and output processes essential to learning (Principles and Practice 31). Learners from regional backgrounds often worry about making mistakes, being laughed at by their peers, or receiving negative feedback. This anxiety can stifle their participation and limit their chances to practice.

### 3.5 Lack of Exposure to Interactive Environments

Richards and Renandya stress that "speaking practice must involve interaction, negotiation of meaning, and real-time language use" (Methodology in Language Teaching 123). Unfortunately, in many regional settings, lessons remain lecture-based, with little student talk-time. Rather than being a tool for communication, English is often treated just like any other subject. Students miss out on engaging in discussions, debates, storytelling, or even casual conversations in English.

## 4. Theoretical Foundations Supporting Accuracy Development

To enhance grammatical and vocabulary accuracy among learners of regional languages, we should take a closer look at Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories. These frameworks provide insight into how learners process language, why they make mistakes, and what types of input and instruction can help them tackle their challenges.

### 4.1 Communicative Competence (Canale & Swain, 1980)

Canale and Swain's model of communicative competence serves as a cornerstone in language education, highlighting four key components of language proficiency: Grammatical, Sociolinguistic, Discourse and Strategic competence. (12)

these grammatical competence—the ability to use syntax, morphology, vocabulary, and phonology correctly—is foundational to spoken accuracy. As they note, this type of competence is “concerned with the mastery of the language code itself” (Canale and Swain 6). A student may have brilliant ideas but can struggle to convey them clearly without a solid grasp of grammar. Thus, teaching should focus on helping learners internalize structures that promote both correctness and effective communication.

#### 4.2 Interlanguage Theory (Selinker, 1972)

Larry Selinker introduced the concept of interlanguage, which describes the dynamic linguistic system that learners develop as they work towards mastering a new language. This system showcases influences from their native language alongside their growing understanding of English. Understanding interlanguage enables teachers to view these errors as part of the learning process and to provide feedback that gently steers students toward more accurate language use.

#### 4.3 Krashen’s Input Hypothesis (1982)

Stephen Krashen highlighted the importance of comprehensible input—language that’s just a step beyond what the learner already knows (often referred to as  $i+1$ ). As Krashen writes, “we acquire language when we understand messages” (Principles and Practice 21). In practical terms, this means giving students listening and reading materials that introduce new vocabulary and grammar in contexts that make sense to them. Storytelling, conversations with teachers, and interactions with peers can all provide excellent sources of this comprehensible input.

#### 4.4 Swain’s Output Hypothesis (1985)

While Krashen emphasized input, Merrill Swain brought attention to the importance of output—speaking and writing—as essential for language development. According to Swain, “output pushes learners to process language more

Grammar and Vocabulary Accuracy in Spoken English  
Secondary Students: A Theoretical and Empirical Study

deeply... and to test out their hypotheses about how the language works  
("Communicative Competence" 249). Activities like role-plays, debates, and group  
discussions are vital not just for building fluency but also for enhancing accuracy.

### 4.5 Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978)

Vygotsky's theory underscores the crucial role of social interaction in learning. He suggested that learners progress through collaborative dialogue within what's known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)—the gap between what they can do independently and what they can achieve with help. In the context of language learning, this means students can improve their grammar and vocabulary accuracy through guided speaking activities with their classmates and teachers.

## 5. Strategies for Enhancing Grammar and Vocabulary Accuracy

To help learners from diverse backgrounds boost their grammar and vocabulary skills in spoken English, teaching strategies should be tailored to the students, relevant to their experiences, and integrated into daily classroom interactions. As Richards and Renandya note, "the teaching of speaking should be based on real interaction and the negotiation of meaning, not just grammar drills or pronunciation exercises" (*Methodology in Language Teaching* 125).

### 5.1 Contextual Grammar Practice

According to Thornbury, "students need to experience grammar in context, not just in isolated sentences" (*How to Teach Speaking* 43). Activities like role-plays, dialogues, and simulations give learners the chance to practice grammar in real-life situations. This not only encourages them to use the target structure but also helps them listen and respond in the moment.

### 5.2 Thematic Vocabulary Teaching

Teaching vocabulary goes beyond just memorizing definitions. Nation recommends vocabulary clustering and semantic mapping as effective memory aids.

...that "grouping related words together strengthens retention and supports more accurate use" (Learning Vocabulary 45). For example, rather than throwing out random food terms, you could categorize them by types of cuisine, cooking methods, ingredients, or flavours. This way, students can use these categories to talk about their favourite meals or even role-play a restaurant conversation. Another useful technique is semantic mapping, which visually illustrates the connections between words. This helps learners link new vocabulary to what they already know, making it easier to remember over time.

### §3 Error Correction Techniques

Correcting mistakes can be a bit challenging, especially in spoken language. It's crucial to handle it in a way that promotes learning without making students feel self-conscious. According to Thornbury, "the teacher's role is to find a balance between correcting errors and maintaining communicative flow" (How to Teach Speaking 82). Here are three effective strategies:

- **Recasting:** The teacher rephrases a student's incorrect sentence with the correct form.
- **Elicitation:** This involves prompting the student to correct themselves by pausing or rewording the question.
- **Peer Correction:** Encouraging students to help each other to fix mistakes during group activities which creates a supportive learning environment.

### §4 Task-Based Learning (TBL)

Task-based learning emphasizes using language to accomplish meaningful tasks instead of just drilling grammatical rules. Activities like storytelling, interviews, debates, or event planning provide real-life contexts where using correct grammar and vocabulary is key to success. According to Willis, TBL typically follows three stages: pre-task, task cycle, and language focus, each designed to support both fluency and

accuracy. It encourages natural language use and strengthens accuracy through practical application rather than just theoretical concepts. Richards explains, "the task-based approach provides an ideal context for the development of both communicative fluency and linguistic accuracy" (Methodology in Language Teaching 247). In regional classrooms where speaking is often underemphasized, TBL can reintroduce English as a tool for authentic expression.

### 5.5 Digital Tools and AI-Based Support

Digital learning also lowers affective filters by enabling private, pressure-free practice. As Thornbury notes, "learners often need a safe space to experiment with language without fear of judgment" (How to Teach Speaking 67). This is especially vital for regional learners dealing with anxiety or low confidence in English-speaking environments. Nowadays, there are numerous digital platforms that offer tools for vocabulary practice, grammar feedback, and interactive voice-based speaking exercises.

## 6. Conclusion

Mastering accurate grammar and vocabulary is vital for achieving proficiency in spoken English. For higher secondary students from regional language backgrounds, the journey towards clear and confident communication is often hindered by challenges such as L1 interference, limited exposure, and the anxiety of making mistakes. With the right guidance, thoughtful assessments, and a reflective approach to teaching, we can definitely tackle these challenges head-on. This study has laid out a solid theoretical and observational foundation that highlights the significance of accuracy, identifies common mistakes learners make, and offers strategies rooted in second language acquisition theory.

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