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TYPES OF WRITTEN VERB-FORM ERRORS MADE BY SARAWAKIAN MALAY ESL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to identify and describe the written verb-form errors found in three tenses (past, present and future) made by Sarawakian Malay English as a Second Language (ESL) students. It is significant as it can provide important feedback to the curriculum designers, teachers and the students themselves. The subjects' errors were identified and described before explanations were given for them following Corder's 1981 scheme. The subjects were fifty Malay ESL students in a local institution of higher learning, MARA Institute of Technology, Sarawak. Questionnaires were distributed to gather background information on the subjects. The subjects were also required to write three types of compositions (narrative, descriptive and expository) of about 150 words each in both English and Bahasa Malaysia. The identified errors were categorized as errors of omission, addition, misformation and ordering. The highest percentage of errors were those of misformation (63.4%) followed by those of omission (29%), addition (7.6%) and ordering (0.1%). By essay type, it was found that the highest percentage of errors was found in the narrative essay (40.3%) followed by the descriptive essay (32.7%) and the expository essay (27.0%). For the tense category, the highest percentage of errors was found in the past tense (37.6%) followed by the present tense (33.7%), future tense (21.5%) and other verb-forms (7.3%). This study revealed that the English tense-aspect system (ETAS) and subject-verb agreement were the most difficult areas in the verb structure to master for the Malay students. Both interlingual factor (mother tongue influence) and intralingual factor (complexities within the target language) accounted for the errors made. Recommendations made in this study will be useful for pedagogical purposes.