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

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Submitted to the Language Centre of the University of Malaya in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master in English as a Second Language (MESL)

APRIL 1995
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to express my thanks to MARA Institute of Technology for granting me study leave and a scholarship to pursue this course. My deepest appreciation goes to my Supervisor, Mrs Cecilia Fredericks, for her invaluable help and guidance throughout the writing of this thesis. I would also like to thank my husband, Charles, for his support and encouragement as well as for looking after my son when I was away from home doing my coursework. Special thanks go to my dearest friends, Moo Hung and Seng Kee and to my cousin, Gwen and her husband, Jegak, for their kind assistance in one way or another during my stay in Kuala Lumpur.
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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.