

## CHAPTER 2

### 2.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

#### 2.1 The Role Of English

##### 2.1.1 The Role Of English In Pre-Independent Malaya

Malaysia is a cosmopolitan country because of its plural society. Its population comprises of people who come from varied ethnic and linguistic backgrounds as a result of the migration of these races to the Malay Peninsula. The middle of the 19th century saw fundamental changes in the economic pattern of Malaya. The tin-mining industry, the rubber industry and the development of Penang as an entrepôt, led to the import of Chinese and Indians to the Peninsula.

Wong & Ee (1971) mention that the history of education in any country shows that economics is a major factor in influencing the educational structure or pattern of the country. Before Independence, English was the language of the British government and administration, as well as the dominant language of commerce. During the British period, two types of schools emerged:- the vernacular schools, i.e., the Malay vernacular in the rural areas where the Malays predominated, the Tamil and Chinese vernaculars and the English - medium schools in the urban

areas, where day-to-day trade and business was carried out.

From the beginning, English, as a medium of instruction was highly valued because of the political and economic advantages that it brought. (Wong & Ee: 1971; Heah: 1989 and Asmah: 1982). It was identified with the priveleged and the Malay medium of education was looked upon as the poor-man's lot!. Thus, English was the "gateway" to upward mobility and material progress.

Yet, the growth of nationalism provided the impetus for the revival of the Malay language. The independence of Malaya from British rule saw this change. The Razak Report (1956) advocated the need to establish a national system of education with regard to making Malay, the national language for integration (integrative motivation). Malay was to be the compulsory subject in all schools. Malay became the **national language** in 1957.

However Article 152(1) of the Constitution of the Federation of Malaysia, provided that official language use in government administration and official functions was to be shared between Malay and English until 1967. The Language Bill of 1967, also allowed the retention of English and other languages apart from the national language. In 1969, Bahasa Melayu

was re-named Bahasa Malaysia.

Simultaneously, efforts were carried out to establish Malay as the main medium of education. This involved the setting up of new schools and the gradual changing over of English schools, i.e., schools using English as the medium of instruction, into national schools. The end of 1982 saw this complete transition at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education.

Thus, English became the country's Second Language in schools and played a more restricted role in the fields of education, official and inter-ethnic communication, as Bahasa Malaysia (which was renamed Bahasa Melayu in mid 1993) played a more dominant role.

#### **2.1.2 The Present Status Of English In The Malaysian Education System**

The Malaysian Education System has legitimised Bahasa Melayu as the sole medium of instruction in all schools except in Chinese and Tamil schools. English is a compulsory subject as it is the SL in Malaysia. The aim of the government in making English the SL here is to ensure that students who have undergone the National education system, can obtain a certain level of

Proficiency to communicate in English. The Report Of The Education Review Committee states that:-

"... English holds a dominating position in international councils and commerce, in the textbooks and literatures of the world. A command of it is one of our national assets."

(1960: 56)

This quotation acknowledges that the government is very aware of the commercial and international value of the English language. It is also the tool for obtaining specialised information, i.e., a language of knowledge especially, technological information. This is also emphasized in the Third Malaysian Plan (1976 - 1980).

In the teaching of English in Malaysian schools, the KBSR and KBSM syllabi have superseded the "Communicational Syllabus" of 1977. Now it is the imparting of the 4 basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing which are the pivotal concepts of the KBSR & KBSM syllabi. The 4 skills and the grammatical items are to be integrated into a whole and taught as such. Teachers are trained to attempt to link each skill laterally in terms of themes and topics. The KBSM syllabus gives the chance to help students learn and practise these useful life-skills. It also advocates a "whole person" or

holistic approach in that it views learning English as one aspect of a student's personal development.

The KBSR syllabus emphasizes the training of vocabulary and structures at the primary school level. At the secondary school level, the emphasis is on 'communicative competence' (Hymes: 1972).

In the universities and colleges, students are tested on their proficiency in English. Students whose levels of proficiency are severely lacking, are required to attend English Language classes. Technical and vocational government schools use Bahasa Melayu as their medium of instruction for the semi-professional course, but English is often a compulsory subject. Hence, English is no longer the official language of Malaysia. This change in the status of English has brought with it a host of attendant problems for both teachers and learners. English is no longer the medium of instruction in schools but just a subject, offered in the school curriculum.

## **2.2 Discussion Of The Problem**

Malaysian learners of English in our school system, fail to achieve an acceptable level of competence in the language despite the fact that they have studied English

as a subject throughout their school career. This is because English no longer holds such pre-eminence in the educational system. In reality, English is not a second language but a foreign language in most primary and secondary schools.

Tongue (1979: 18) has said that the phasing out of English as a medium of instruction in the educational system will render English as a foreign language. This will definitely affect the proficiency level of English and Tongue correctly predicted a drop in the level of proficiency among young Malaysians. An article in the **New Straits Times** dated 5 AUGUST 1988 and included in Appendix A states:-

"... Except for some of the urban centres. English is a foreign language to most of our students. They are not adequately exposed to the language. Their limited exposure is often a passive one..."

Jakobovits (1970) noted that only a small proportion of students who go through the high school and college foreign language curricula achieve sufficient competence to be able to use the foreign language meaningfully. This is contained in his "North East Conference Report 1970". Thus, Raimes (1983) has punned aptly when she terms ESL as "Anguish As A Second Language." To

Malaysian students, learning English can be agonising! Although English is a compulsory subject in schools, many students know that a pass in the English Language paper is no longer crucial for securing a pass in public examinations like the P.M.R. or S.P.M.. Thus, they adopt a lackadaisical attitude towards the study of English. Moreover, they find that they do not need to use the language as they can use Bahasa Melayu to fill in official forms, write letters or carry out daily transactions. Furthermore, they have their mother tongue at their disposal for peer interaction. Thus, there is a lack of an expressive environment for the use of English. Most of the English spoken by students is confined to the classroom only during the English period and even then, if there is peer interaction, some other language will be used. The classroom represents an artificial language learning environment and consequently, there are insufficient opportunities for the learner to practice his language. He makes errors that eventually become fossilized because of this lack of opportunity for extended practice.

The drop in the proficiency of English Language among students can also be attributed to the shortage of English specialists as teachers. This is mentioned in an

article published in the **Berita Harian** dated 23 MARCH 1991 (See Appendix B). Other factors contributing to this drop can be traced to the large enrolment in classes, and consequently, a lack of individualized attention for students. With an average of 45 students per class there is little opportunity for teachers to meet the needs of each student/learner and thus, there is little or no opportunity for the teacher to recognise and cater to the different learning styles of the learner. Moreover, the non-native environment in Malaysia most probably delays and impedes the students from mastering the language skills. However, there is a resurgence in the call to revive the use of the English language. The various government economic development policies have shown that English is indispensable as a second language especially in the acquisition of scientific and technological information and expertise. Furthermore, the appeal of English as an International language and lingua franca is an important factor in the renewed emphasis given to the teaching and learning of the language. This is known as instrumental motivation where the utilitarian value of English becomes the focus of teaching and learning. This is dwelt upon in the Malay article published in the **Berita Harian** dated 23 MARCH 1991 (please refer to Appendix B).

### 2.3 The Pilot Study

The sample for the pilot study consisted of twelve students from Sekolah Menengah Taman Dato' Harun. The students from this school were ethnic Malays studying in Form Four. There was an equal number of girls and boys.

The pilot tests used to elicit the language corpus for analysis were extracted and adapted from "Controlled And Guided Compositions (Occasional Papers No: 3)" by Tongue et. al., (1986). These compositions are included in Appendices C to F. The pilot test instrument consisted of four sections, each section setting a composition topic (see Table 2 below).

**Table 2**

**Table Showing The Structure Of The Pilot Test**

No.	Composition Title	Textual Type	Format
A	A Balloon That Won't Burst	Descriptive (Process)	Informal letter
B	A Traffic Jam	Narrative (Cause and Effect)	Report Writing
C	An Honest Man	Narrative (Sequential)	Story Writing
D	A River Journey	Descriptive (Static)	Story Writing

The purpose of giving different composition types was primarily to elicit a variety of linguistic items. As Corder (1981: 38) says, the greater part of all EA is concerned with written data, so compositions are a good source of linguistic data. Furthermore, these composition types were typical of those that upper secondary students should be familiar with.

The pilot study was administered by the researcher herself in September 1993. The informants were not allowed to use external aids. The scripts were then collected and scored for the purpose of analysis and interpretation. The main purpose of the pilot study was to:-

(a) determine the types of errors made by the Malay students in using subordinating conjunctions.

and (b) identify the difficulties faced by the Malay students in using subordinating conjunctions.

The analysis of errors entailed the recognition, description, classification and explanation of errors according to steps proposed by Corder (1979) and

Hendrickson (1981). The following table shows the Percentage of errors in subordinating conjunctions, made by the students.

**Table 3**  
**Percentage Of Errors Of Subordinating Conjunctions**  
**Made By Informants In The Pilot Study**

Subordinating Conjunctions	Percentage of Errors
When	25.0
Although	20.0
After	12.5
Before	10.0
Because	10.0
While	8.5
Since	8.0
Until	2.6
Despite	2.0
If	1.4
Total	100.0

The following is a sample of errors made by the students in the pilot study. Although the students made numerous and various grammatical errors, the researcher tabulated and analyzed only errors of subordinating conjunctions. Also, please note that the sentences reproduced below have been corrected and edited by the researcher, to be as close in meaning and structure to the original sentence produced by the informants. Only the errors in the use of subordinating conjunctions have been highlighted and they have not been corrected to show the

type of errors elicited in the data.

- (a) **Since** the balloon is pierced, it will not burst.

**(Misuse)**

- (b) It will not burst. There is a piece of scotch tape on the balloon.

**(Omission)**

- (c) There was an accident **because** there was a traffic jam.

**(Wrong order in idea - misplacement)**

- (d) **Until** the two cars were in the middle of the intersection, the other vehicles could not move.

**(Misuse)**

- (e) He shouted loudly **although** he was drunk.

**(Misuse)**

- (f) **After** they were quarrelling, their cars banged into one another.

**(Wrong order - misplacement)**

- (g) **Since** he was walking through the park, he saw a handbag on a bench.

**(Misuse)**

- (h) **Until** he saw the handbag on the bench, he ran after Mrs. Tan.

**(Misuse)**

- (i) I had to pass Kalu **when** I reached Simma.

(Misuse)

- (j) If I was careful, the boat would capsize.

(Misuse)

- (k) I reached Cherik **because** it was my last port-of-call.

(Addition).

The most frequent types of errors were basically the misuse and omission of subordinating conjunctions. These errors were global errors in that they totally distorted the message and the content. On a general basis, 70 per cent of the errors were the misuse of subordinating conjunctions i.e., errors of selection. 20 per cent of the errors were errors of omission, where the subordinating conjunctions had been omitted in places where they should have been used. 5 per cent were errors of misplacement, i.e., errors resulting from incorrect positioning of the conjunction, thus generating semantically incorrect statements. Finally, 5 percent of the errors were errors of addition, where subordinating conjunctions were added in places they should not have been present. Consequently, based on the results of the pilot study, the researcher feels that most Malay students do not understand subordinating,

conjunctions.

The pilot study, thus, enabled the researcher to:

- (a) determine the purpose of the study
  - (b) determine the purpose of testing
  - (c) select appropriate item types (cloze, multiple choice etc.)
- and
- (d) prepare a set of relevant test items as test instruments for Research Design.

#### 2.4 Significance Of The Study

Generally, the students in Malaysia are very weak in morphology. They have a poor grasp of fundamental grammar and lack the vocabulary to express their thoughts and views in English. Despite the KBSM syllabus' focus on integrating content and skills, the students still lack the accepted level of proficiency. The pilot test confirmed the weaknesses of the Malay secondary school learner in the use of subordinating conjunctions.

Identifying and recognising subordinating conjunctions is an important technique in understanding the messages one encounters in speech and in writing. Moreover, the ability to recognise these structural elements and to use

them correctly, can increase the learner's efficiency in reading and writing, as subordinating conjunctions are highly frequent words. In the KBSM Syllabus, they appear under the reference number S.3.1. In the Curriculum Specifications, subordinating conjunctions are dealt with under referent S.10 for Forms 1 - 3 and referents S.5 and S.11 in the Upper forms, i.e., Forms 4 and 5.

### 2.5 Limitations Of The Pilot Study

As the data gathered focussed on twelve informants only, the results cannot be generalized. A more extensive study was undertaken to explain fully the errors. The study is to be undertaken in Sekolah Menengah Taman Dato' Harun as the majority of the students are ethnic Malays and about seventy-five per cent of them are from the lower income group. They come from the squatter areas located nearby.

It is not within the scope of this study to describe the entire system of subordination nor to provide instant solutions to the difficult task of teaching conjunctions. This study aims to use the best available approach (i.e., the Error Analysis Methodology) to find out the learners' shortcomings in the use of subordinating conjunctions.

## 2.6 Aims Of The Study

The ERROR ANALYSIS HYPOTHESIS provides the theoretical framework for this study. The analysis of errors and discussion of findings is based on the work of Corder, Selinker, Hendrickson & Richards. The objectives of this study are:

- (a) to identify the subordinating conjunctions that are correctly and incorrectly used by Malay students at secondary school level, which will serve as part of the basis for the preparation of instructional materials.
- (b) to obtain quantitative data on the amount (i.e., frequency and percentage) and type of errors within the framework of sentences.
- (c) to note down patterns in the use and misuse of conjunctions obtained as data in (a) and to establish the hierarchy of Malay students' difficulties so that more emphasis may be placed on the more difficult conjunctions.

- (d) to establish or identify the causes or factors that gave rise to the errors.
- (e) to investigate the extent to which Bahasa Melayu, the mother tongue of the Malay students, affects their learning of conjunctions, if any.
- (f) to suggest remedial and pedagogical measures that may assist the ESL teacher in teaching subordinating conjunctions more effectively.

Based on the above objectives, this thesis hopes to arrive at tentative conclusions about the ability of using subordinating conjunctions among Malay upper secondary school students.