

CHAPTER 6

6.0 FINDINGS AND PEDAGOGICAL SUGGESTIONS

6.1 Introduction

This study was undertaken to investigate the level of understanding in the usage of English subordinating conjunctions among upper secondary Malay students. Consequently, data was collated from four different assignments and administered to fifty informants. The data elicited was analyzed using the EA concept.

6.2 Findings

From the analysis of the data, the researcher gathered the following information.

- (i) Only sixty six per cent of the informants managed to score fifty per cent and above in the assignments.
- (ii) The majority of the informants find the conditional conjunctions ('unless' and 'if') the most complex to comprehend and use. In fact, most of the informants could use only the Conjunctions of Place ('where' and 'wherever') easily and confidently, despite the fact that all

the other conjunctions are found in the EL syllabus of Malaysian schools.

- (iii) It is most obvious to discern that the informants do not know how to use subordinating conjunctions as lexical and morphological devices in combining sentences. They lack the knowledge in knowing how to use these conjunctions properly to tie/combine their ideas together. Thus, they display a general ignorance of the syntactically complex system of written English. This ignorance could be attributed to the fact that subordinating conjunctions are **Higher Order Concerns** and most students avoid using them if possible. Leavelle (1984: 32) quotes Givon (1979: 224) and O'Donnell (1976: 103) in saying that studies of child acquisition of connectives reveal that **subordination is a complex logical relation**, directly tied to the age and level of education of children. In other words, an acquisition of **literacy skills** (i.e, reading and writing) is needed to increase the students' grasp of subordinating conjunctions.

(iv) The investigator strongly believes that there is no interference of the first language (i.e., Bahasa Melayu) of the informants in learning or using the subordinating conjunctions in the EL. As a matter of fact, the investigator finds that a mastery of the conjunctions in the L1, would have facilitated the learning and usage of the conjunctions in the EL. The errors were due largely to the misunderstanding of the lexical meaning of the subordinating conjunctions and the failure to understand the semantic and syntactic nature/relationship which existed between the sentences. Hence, the informants used the conjunctions wrongly.

(v) From the questionnaire given to the subjects and the interviews conducted with them, the researcher found that the majority of the subjects prefer to use their MT to interact and communicate. Combined with their poor reading habits, especially in the EL, their vocabulary is limited. The subjects also rarely write in English because of their poor command of the language. As we all know, subordination is used more by writers than speakers and this dire lack of the need to use subordinating conjunctions,

results in **poor writing styles**. Good writing is usually evaluated as writing which has a variety of lexical items and grammatical structures, especially adverbial clauses. The use of subordinating conjunctions is only prevalent in superior writing and thus, a lack of knowledge of subordinating conjunctions, results in a lack of literacy (i.e., writing and reading) and a vicious circle develops.

6.3 Pedagogical Suggestions

The English language is a second language in Malaysia. Yet there is a growing concern about the deterioration in the language. ESL has become a 'foreign language' in many schools. It is undeniable that English is here to stay and it is imperative that the government, teachers and students themselves, arrest this decline by finding ways to upgrade the standard of English.

Below are a few suggestions for the mastery of the EL among upper secondary Malay students. They are general guidelines and the list is not exhaustive.

- (1) The language used in the classroom is not 'real language'. To stimulate and sustain interest in the EL, the teacher could **contextualize** exercises and language activities so that English is practised in **realistic situations**. For teachers, drilling grammatical structures and setting exercises that require little or no thinking on the part of the students are a boon, as they provide ease of grading. However, the mechanical manipulation of syntactic structures should not be used throughout a lesson. It can be used at the beginning but it would prove to be more effective to let the student apply these structures (e.g. adverbial clauses using subordinating conjunctions) through problem-solving. This gives the student confidence in using the language. **Games, role-playing and simulation** enable students to interact using the target structure.
- (2) The teacher's role is not an easy one. Lots of **classroom preparation** is needed. Once having identified the language items the learners will need in order to carry out a certain task, the teacher has to reinforce this learning by planning activities involving **re-structuring and selection of the information/text given using the target structure**. For written exercises, the teacher

should help by showing where the error is and encourage **peer correction**. Learners only approach the teacher when absolutely necessary as the teacher is a facilitator and not a 'dictator'. This approach will create an atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence.

- (3) The traditional method of teaching rules of grammar i.e., the grammar translation method is not encouraged. Exercises and activities designed by the teacher should not focus on the rules alone but on how syntactic structures like subordinating conjunctions signal **meaning, form and function**. Grammar classes need to highlight both FORM and FUNCTION. As McKay says:

"... it is not enough that our students know how to correctly make simple statements (FORM) such as 'please give me a cake', they need to be aware that they are making a request (FUNCTION) and that there are other ways of saying the same thing."

(1987: xiv)

We can stretch this further by adding "... they need to be aware too of the meaning of the words (lexis, morpheme) they are using."

- (4) There is also the prevalent problem of a shortage of qualified English teachers in the country. In some schools any teacher who can speak English (even if it is minimal) is straight away 'promoted' to an English teacher. These teachers may induce errors while teaching. These teachers are themselves insecure with the EL and a vicious cycle of poor English develops.

For these teachers and other teachers who are qualified but who have no further ways to keep abreast of current teaching methods, there are many opportunities to help enhance their competency in the EL. **Peer networking**, where there is mutually supportive linguistic and communicative competence, can be introduced at District levels. In Malaysia, there is the **Teacher Support Team**, that allows for the pooling of resources. **INSET** (In-service Education for Teachers) courses too can be a source of teacher development. By increasing their competence, teachers will help to upgrade the teaching-learning process of English.

- (5) An effective way of improving general language proficiency is **reading**. It is found that many of the students do not read English materials outside

the classroom. The interview with the students confirmed this finding. Researchers have shown that there is a strong link between reading success in school and early reading experiences at home (Durkin: 1966).

Using the **Class Readers** in the ESL classroom is an excellent way of encouraging reading. The Education Ministry of Malaysia has introduced the Class Reader Programme to:

- (i) expose students to materials in English
 - (ii) motivate students to read and inculcate in them the reading habit
 - (iii) help students increase their language proficiency through teaching materials that can enrich and consolidate learning.
- and (iv) to generate interest in and prepare students for possible literature study.

These aims can be found under the chapter "General Instructions" in any Teaching File. This 'plus one' period using the class reader, encourages the

learner to read for enjoyment. The learner 'latently absorbs' the EL when he does while-reading activities with the Class Reader. Maybe, this 'plus one' period could be extended to a 'plus two' period, i.e., increasing the number of English periods in schools, as the more extensive a student's reading is, the more likely he will possess an active command of vocabulary and language items. A good reading ability is the most important skill to enhance competency in English, especially in writing.

- (6) Since the time allocation for EL is insufficient, the **teacher-student ratio** should be small. At present, the KBSM syllabus is crippled by the fact that teachers have to deal with an average of 40 - 45 students per class. An English teacher is usually given three, four or sometimes even five classes of English with mixed-ability students to teach. The teacher becomes loaded with marking and the joy of teaching disappears along the way. It is suggested that a class should not exceed more than thirty students, so that the quality of teaching

improves and ultimately, learning too.

- (7) The researcher proposes the creation of an **EL conducive environment** in school. Posters promoting the use of the language, labelling, common idioms, current news events and even the lyrics of popular English songs or synopses of the latest blockbuster movies can be put up in the school grounds. Students who 'hang around' before and after school or during recess, may read these materials to occupy themselves. Accessibility is the key word here.

- (8) The use of **authentic materials** in language teaching is encouraged. The newspaper is an endless source of materials for the innovative teacher. Lucille Dass (1989) encourages the use of the newspaper in the ESL classroom because it:

- (i) is cheap and easily available
- (ii) is realistic
- (iii) has many wide ranging topics - education, advertisements, entertainment, sports, current issues, comics, reviews etc.

and (iv) helps students to develop reading and writing skills.

Using the newspaper allows for activity-oriented lessons which are more student-centred than teacher-centred.

- (9) A **sample of exercises** has been included in Appendix J. These materials have been pre-tested in school and only the feasible lessons have been included. These exercises have also been graded from the least to the most difficult. The aim of the exercises in Appendix J, is to show the types of exercises available for the English Language teachers to use.

These exercises provide plenty of practice in using the correct subordinating conjunctions and they cover teaching points systematically. The teacher can adapt the tasks given for effective use with differing levels of students.

- (10) **Cloze texts** are also recommended by Taylor and Taylor (1990) as subordinating conjunctions belong to a closed set in that their number is fixed and they can be predicted by students. To ensure that

the use of subordinating conjunctions is predictable, the teacher must use exercises where conjunctions:

- (i) occur frequently in general use
 - (ii) occur frequently within a discourse/
text
 - (iii) are syntactically constrained within
a sentence (e.g., a subordinating
conjunction occurs in an adverbial
clause, i.e., a dependent clause).
- and (iv) are syntactically constrained within a
discourse (i.e., subordinating conjunctions
relate to the topic and semantic content of
the preceding and following sentences).