

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents a detailed description of the selection of subjects, design of the study, data collection and data analysis.

Selection of Subjects

The subjects of this study were selected from my Semester 3C class because they had undergone two semesters of grammar input as well as process writing as advocated in the syllabus. Students who failed in their PMR and SPM English were chosen and they were identified as low proficiency students. College records indicated that the students shared similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In addition, these students did not have any specific learning problems or handicap conditions.

Design of the Study

Figure 1 shows the the flow chart which presents the procedures of the study.

Figure 1: Procedures of study

Week	Procedures	Sources of data
1	Students write an in-class guided composition through pictures with assistance from teacher and peers. Session lasts 60 minutes.	initial writing samples
2-4	Teacher reads out sentences containing target structures. Students listen and craft out sentences orally. Students write out sentences making use of the target structures. Session lasts 60 minutes. This step is repeated for the other 3 syntactic structures, sentence connectors, prepositional phrases and adverbial phrases of time.	treatment phase
5	Students write another in-class guided composition through pictures with assistance from teacher and peers. Session lasts 60 minutes.	after treatment writing samples
6	Teacher evaluates students' writing and determine the grammatical errors made and the number of target structures used.	data collection and analysis
7	Teacher conducts an interview with students to elicit information to answer research question number two.	interview

Data Collection

Data for the study consist of the students' rewrites before and after treatment and transcripts of the interview. Samples of writing data before instructions are required as this provides a useful point of comparison for the study.

Writing sessions

The writing sessions consisted of one-hour lesson per week for five weeks and it was divided into three phases, namely (a) Phase 1- conventional process writing in week 1, (b) Phase 2- substantial teacher intervention in the form of sentence modelling in week 2-4 and, (c) Phase 3- writing session in week 5.

Phase 1. In week 1, the initial writing task, carried out as in-class writing class was based on a guided composition through pictures, *Painting the House* (see Appendix A). The guided composition provided the vocabulary needed for the essays and this served as content input for my students. This vocabulary input also provided the contextual opportunities so that the students had more time to express their thoughts explicitly.

First, I showed the picture composition on an overhead transparency. Then the students were required to complete the sentences to make a paragraph. A conventional process approach was adopted to help the students in their writing assignment. This approach assumed the following process: the topic was explained and then the students, in groups of four, discussed, brainstormed and used other necessary techniques to gather more content for the composition. This process took about 20 minutes. The students were then given 40 minutes to write out the composition. Next, the grammar and content of the compositions were addressed by their peers in the class as an out-of-class activity as I did not want my students to take up their writing time

doing revising and editing. I felt this would adversely affect the number of words written and more important, the overall writing competence score. The students then prepared a second draft which was received by the class teacher (labelled Writing Sample 1). I read them, focusing on grammar errors and vocabulary. Errors were written in the margin. This provided data for the initial writing sample.

Phase 2. In this phase, data was obtained to find out if students could be taught to improve in their writing skill if they were trained at sentence level. The students went through the following plan of work from the second week to the fourth week. The students received 60-minute training sessions over a 3-week period. The teacher familiarized the subjects with syntactic structures such as: (a) subordinate clauses introduced by *when, while, after, before*, (b) prepositional clauses such as *two days later, last week*, (c) conjunction such as *because* clause to show cause, and (d) sentence connectors. However, I did not use grammar terminology so that my students would be more comfortable in learning these structures. Each structure was taught through some reading, listening and speaking activities. Therefore, these syntactic structures were specifically chosen because they were often used in narrative writing and would be useful in their writing assignment.

Each 60-minute lesson was divided into various stages with a variety of activities. The practice exercises used to teach a given structure ranged from simple sentences to gap filling in a paragraph. The initial practice exercises given were highly controlled exercises to familiarize students with the sentence structure. Once the students had mastered the highly controlled exercise, they could move on to the less controlled exercise that practice the same sentence structure. It was hoped that these controlled exercises taught through various skills would enable my low proficiency

students to learn basic structures such as subordination clauses and adverbial clauses of time and prepositional clauses (see Appendix C).

I spent 5 minutes reading as many sentences with the *when* clause to the class in week 2. Sample sentences demonstrating the use of *when* were shown to the students. At this particular stage, I drew my students' attention to see if they could identify patterns. In the next 15 minutes, I explained some simple, explicit grammatical rules so that this mechanical practice actually became cognitive. It was also important that I showed them the connection between the examples and the explicit rules so that they could develop a generalization which best described the use of *when*. The exercises were designed to give the students practice on the structure of selected clauses and these sequentially order exercises gave them the opportunities to transfer the skills acquired from one exercise to the next and finally to the writing task. Hence, it was essential that the students were made aware of the structures of the subordinate clauses through the explanations of examples of the sentence patterns.

After this explanation, I put my students in groups of four and gave each group a transparency and a pen. I showed five incomplete sentences on an overhead transparency. Each group was then asked to complete the sentences given with words of their own choice on the transparency. This stage took about 10 minutes. The rationale of this stage was to provide the students experience in applying their acquired knowledge to produce a correct utterance, thus giving them more meaningful examples of how and in what situations the tense could be used. In addition, this allowed the students to develop the confidence necessary for success in sentence modelling. Then, the text was written on each transparency as it was spoken. Students then read aloud their work when it had been completely written. I would listen to the students'

responses without interrupting. If there were mistakes, I would correct the mistakes by repeating the sentence in the grammatically correct way. I would also prompt my students with the grammatically correct structure if the situation arose.

This procedure was repeated with a similar sequence for the next syntactic structure, namely the *while* clause. Students completed sentences orally using the words given and putting the verb in the past tense. To allow the students to develop a variety of stylistic options, I read a number of illustrative examples with both *when* and *while* clauses on the transparencies. Then I wrote a number of incomplete sentences on the transparency. Students completed them orally, making use of the knowledge they had acquired. This allowed the students to compare alternative structures.

As I agree with Weaver (1996) that grammar should be taught in context, the next 10 minutes was devoted to teaching the structures in context. The passage entitled *The Lost Knife* was shown to students on the transparency. Students were required to construct phrases orally to replace the underlined. This exercise involved more than simple mechanical syntactic manipulations. Students learned that the order of presentation of the sentences was important. They also learned that there was a sequence of events in paragraphs of chronological order. They learned that the verbs referring to these events were all in the same tense and the use of structure words such as *first*, *next*, *then* and *finally* were used to help clarify the sequence for the reader.

From week 3 to week 4, this cycle was repeated with the remaining clauses until the other syntactic structures, prepositional clauses, adverbial clauses of time and sentence connectors were completed.

Phase 3. In week 5, the final writing task was also based on a guided composition through pictures (see Appendix B). To ensure the initial and final writing

tasks were comparable, a narrative-type essay with vocabulary input which made use of the past tense was also selected. This provided the students with contextual opportunities so that they were able to spend more time repeating the correct use of the structures that they had learned. This would also reduce the vocabulary errors which might in turn, affect the comprehensibility of the essay. The writing task was also specifically selected to reinforce the specific sentence structure taught. In addition, the level of difficulty was kept to a level similar to the initial writing task. The task was then presented to my experienced colleague to justify the comparability of the task. To further ascertain that the process is also comparable, the conventional process approach was adopted to help the students in their writing assignment.

Equipped with this knowledge of the basic structure of clauses, the students were asked to write an essay using as many syntactic clauses that they had learned and crafted in the classroom lessons. Students were also instructed to use paragraphs and complete sentences. This writing task was carried out as in-class writing class. The students were then given 40 minutes to write on the guided composition. The grammar aspects of the compositions were reinforced during the revision and editing stages and this was addressed by their peers in the class as an out-of-class activity. Subsequently the students prepared a second draft, labelled Writing Sample 2 as an out-of-class activity. The compositions were again checked for content, grammar and vocabulary and errors were written in the margin. This provided data for the final writing sample.

Evaluation of Writing Performance

Writing performance of all the Writing Samples 1 and 2 of the students' compositions were graded using the Coop's Analytic Scoring Guide (1983) in the sixth week (see Appendix D). This Analytic Scoring Guide was chosen because this scale is

simple and readily understood by the rater. It also takes into considerations of factors such as paragraph format, unity, sentence structure, main idea and supporting details and mechanics. This assessment made use of a standard, structured paragraph with a descriptive marking scale which ranged from 1-4. Nevertheless, minor modifications were necessary because key words were provided in the guided compositions in this current study. Thus, the assessment for main idea, supporting details, organization and paragraph development were eliminated from the analytic scoring guide. As such, the description of scale addressed issues such as the sentence structure of essays, unity, usage, paragraph format and mechanics like capitalization, spelling and punctuation.

Structural and surface-level errors in the Writing Sample 1 and 2 were identified by the use of circles, symbols and omission marks. Symbols such as *T* were used to indicate an error in verb tense, *sp* for a spelling error and *st* for sentence structure. The types of errors were written in the margin and the compositions were subsequently graded. The total score was used as the measure of the overall quality of the writing skill.

Interview

A structured interview was carried out at the end of the study, that is, after Writing Sample 2 was corrected in week 7. An interview guide, (see Appendix E) designed to focus on the students' opinion on the usefulness of the integrated sentence modelling approach in helping them to improve their writing was used for this purpose. The interview was conducted individually in Bahasa Melayu because their low proficiency level in English would hinder getting my message across. Moreover, they were more proficient in that language and they could give more accurate and reliable

answers. This method would give them an opportunity to voice out their actual feelings.

Data Analysis

The data collected in the form of students' writing samples and interview transcripts were analysed and triangulated to answer the two research questions. Each composition was analyzed to learn the grammatical errors and the number of target structures used. The responses to the interview were also analyzed to discover how useful the integrated sentence modelling approach is to low proficiency students.