THE USE OF HOMOPHONES AMONG UPPER

SECONDARY MALAY STUDENTS

ASHA LATHA A/P B.S. MANIAM

A dissertation submitted in partial

fulfilment of the requirement for the

Degree of Master of Modern Languages

Faculty of Languages and Linguistics

University of Malaya

Kuala Lumpur

1999

Acknowledgement

Knowledge always desires increase;

it is like fire, which must first be

kindled by some external agent, but

which will afterwards propagate itself.

(Johnson)

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the following people who have been the "external agent" that kindled the fire within me to quench my thirst for knowledge and who have made it possible for me to complete this dissertation:

- My mother and father

- Mara Institute of Technology, Shah Alam

- Ms Jagdish Kaur – my supervisor

- The staff and students of Sek. Men. Taman Medan, Old Klang Road (especially Pn. Hema Latha, the former Head of the English Department)

- Pn. Azura Razak

- Ramani Ganesan

- Reshna Reem Ganesan

Abstract

Lexis can be defined as the vocabulary of a language in contrast to its grammar. In the English language class, greater emphasis has always been placed on grammar. The finer points of language involving lexical items like homophones which require higher order thinking are not usually exploited.

The researcher has chosen to do a study of the use of homophones among upper secondary Malay students, specifically the ability of these students to understand and distinguish homophones lexically and semantically. In this study only 20 pairs of homophones have been tested. They were chosen randomly based on the lexical items in the curriculum specifications taught to the upper secondary Malay students of Sekolah Menengah Taman Medan, Petaling Jaya. Some of the objectives of this study are to identify the homophones which are correctly and incorrectly used by these students, to obtain quantitative data vis-a-vis the former, to establish the level of difficulty of the various homophones tested, to categorize the types of errors and to identify the causes of these errors. The Error Analysis framework was used to analyse these errors in tandem with Semantic Theories.

From the four tests administered, it is possible to discern that most of these students do not understand these homophones or their correct usage in a given context. Thus, they are generally ignorant of the existence of such finer elements of the language. There is also obviously a lack of exposure to such words.

Most of the errors recorded were intralingual errors. Many of the homophone errors were local or global errors that rendered the erroneous sentences nonsensical, awkward and totally distorted in meaning.

It can be concluded that homophones are definitely difficult language items for many of the Malay students in this research. Therefore, English language teachers need to emphasize the meaning, form and function of lexical items such as homophones.

Table of Contents

Chapter 3 Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 4 Data Analysis

Chapter 5 Pedagogical Suggestions and Conclusion

Bibliography

List of Tables