

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This academic research is a study on first language transfer amongst Malay students in national primary schools. The study involves two national primary schools in Kajang, Selangor. Since the medium of instruction is Bahasa Melayu, the national language of Malaysia, ESL is taught only as one of the subjects. The exposure of the students to English is very limited unless they speak English at home, with their friends in school or with their neighbours. If they have the initiative, or are encouraged by their parents, they can learn English by reading story books, newspapers, magazines or by watching English programs on television.

However the students' first language, Bahasa Melayu, does interfere with the ESL learning process. If they have more exposure to English in their everyday lives, the effect of first language transfer will be less persistent. Here, first language transfer invariably means negative transfer that will produce language forms that diverge from the norm in the target language. Positive transfer is very difficult to detect because the correct language forms in the target language may be due to the student having learnt these language forms before in the target language. It may not be due to the transfer from the first language, which may have similar language structures as the target language.

Error analysis on the subjects' writing tasks was based on a modified version of the classification of errors by Irene F.H. Wong and Lim Saw Choo (1983). Although the marking of the writing tasks was tedious, it was an enriching experience for the researcher as some of the Year 4 students produced excellent and creative ideas in their compositions. Despite all the criticisms on the decline of the standard of English in Malaysian schools, the researcher somehow feels that there is still some hope in the Malaysian educational system that has given due emphasis to the teaching of English in recent years. This study is but a small contribution towards the ultimate goal of excellence in English in Malaysian schools.

5.2 Research Questions

The findings in Chapter 4 have provided answers to the research questions posed in Chapter 1. They are summarised as follows:

1. Is there a relationship between the first language and the production of written English?

The findings show that 78% of subjects with a high level of first language transfer also have a high level of errors and 80.6% of subjects with a low level of first language transfer also have a low level of errors. There is a positive correlation between first language transfer and errors.

If the level of first language transfer (that is the negative transfer resulting in errors in the target language) is high, the subjects tend to make more errors in the target language and if the level of first language transfer is low, the subjects tend to make less errors in the target language. The

essence of this finding is that first language transfer does interfere with the ESL learning process.

Similar findings are reported in a study of the procedure for measuring and verifying native-language-induced effects in the acquisition of English lexicon by Ard and Homborg (1983). He found that there was abundant evidence for native language influence in lexical learning. Likewise, Broselow (1983) discovered that first language transfer does play a significant role in the formation of a phonological rule in the production of second language forms. Irene F.H. Wong and Lim Saw Choo (1983) , in a local study, also discovered that the presence of parallels in the first language of the subjects reinforced and fossilized the errors committed by the subjects. In another local study by Fatimah (1989), it was found that Contrastive Analysis was successful in predicting first language transfer of the native Malay speakers of English.

However, in contrast to the findings of this study, Tan Poh Li (1994) in a study on lexical errors produced by Malay ESL learners of English, discovered that only 11% of the erroneous forms might be attributed to first language transfer. The majority of the errors, about 88%, were intralingual errors or errors which occurred as a result of difficulties found within the target language itself.

2. What are the errors that are involved in first language transfer in the learning of English as a second language?

The findings show that the errors in descending order of frequency are:

- (i) omission of articles;
- (ii) omission of Be as auxiliary and as main verb;
- (iii) errors in the use of pronouns;
- (iv) omission of the verb suffix for the third singular subjects(present tense);
- (v) the transfer of syntax or structure;
- (vi) omission of the possessive suffix for possessive pronouns;
- (vii) errors in the matter of word order in noun phrases;
- (viii) literal translation of Malay expressions to English;
- (ix) use of Have in place of the existential " there is/are " construction; and
- (x) omission of Do-support in negativization.

In other words, 'omission of articles' is the most frequent type of errors committed by the Year 4 Malay students in the two national primary schools. 'Omission of Be as auxiliary and as main verb' is the next most common type of errors followed by 'errors in the use of pronouns'.

If gender is taken into consideration, the findings show that for the male subjects, the errors in descending order of frequency are:

- (i) omission of Be as auxiliary and as main verb;
- (ii) omission of articles;
- (iii) errors in the use of pronouns;

- (iv) omission of the verb suffix for the third singular subjects (present tense
- (v) the transfer of syntax or structure;
- (vi) omission of the possessive suffix for possessive pronouns;
- (vii) errors in the matter of word order in noun phrases;
- (viii) literal translation of Malay expressions to English;
- (ix) use of Have in place of the existential "there is/are" construction; and
- (x) omission of Do-support in negativization.

For the male subjects, 'omission of Be as auxiliary and as main verb' is the most frequent type of errors followed by 'omission of articles' and 'errors in the use of pronouns'.

As for the female subjects, the errors in order of decreasing frequency are:

- (i) omission of articles;
- (ii) omission of Be as auxiliary and as main verb;
- (iii) error in the use of pronouns;
- (iv) omission of the verb suffix for the third singular subjects(present tense);
- (v) the transfer of syntax or structure;
- (vi) omission of the possessive suffix for possessive pronouns;
- (vii) errors in the matter of word order in noun phrases;
- (viii) literal translation of Malay expressions to English;
- (ix) use of Have in place of the existential "there is/are" construction; and
- (x) omission of Do-support in negativization.

For the female subjects, 'omission of articles' is the most common type of errors followed by 'omission of Be as auxiliary and as main verb' and 'errors in the use of pronouns'.

3. Does gender affect first language transfer in the learning of English as a second language?

From the findings of this study, 73.7% of male subjects with a high level of first language transfer also have a high level of errors and 85.3% of male subjects with a low level of first language transfer also have a low level of errors. It can be concluded that there is a positive correlation between first language transfer and errors for the male subjects.

As for the female subjects, 85.7% of them with a high level of first language transfer also have a high level of errors and 72.4% of them with a low level of first language transfer also have a low level of errors. There is a positive correlation between first language transfer and errors for the female subjects.

However this study also shows that there is no appreciable difference in the effect of first language transfer on errors by gender. In other words, the effect of first language transfer on errors cannot be differentiated by gender.

4. Is there any relationship between the socio-economic background of the subjects and the learning of English as a second language?

The findings of this study show that 47.1% of subjects with a high level of total family monthly income also have a high level of competence in English. 41.2% of the subjects with a low level of total family monthly income also have a low level of competence in English. Hence, there is no positive correlation between the socio-economic background of the subjects and the learning of English as a second language.

5.3 Implication of the Study

The main findings of the study highlighted the need to take into account the effect of first language transfer on the learning of English as a second language. This study shows that first language transfer does play a part in the errors committed by the subjects. ESL teachers should be aware that first language transfer does interfere with learning of English as a second language. For example, ESL teachers should try to find out the common transfer errors and emphasise the correction of these common mistakes to their students during classroom teaching. The researcher would like to give several types of the three most common transfer errors made by the subjects in their writing tasks. The three most common errors are 'omission of articles', omission of Be as auxiliary and as main verb' and 'errors in the use of pronouns'. The correct form of the sentence in English is in parentheses and the correct equivalent in Bahasa Malaysia is in italic.

(i) Examples of errors in 'omission of articles':

(a) I go to hospital.

(I go to the hospital.)

Saya pergi ke hospital.

(b) I walk to shop.

(I walk to the shop.)

Saya berjalan ke kedai itu.

(c) My father walks to bus-stop everyday.

(My father walks to the bus stop every day.)

Ayah saya berjalan ke perhentian bas setiap hari.

(d) The aeroplane can fly to sky.

(The aeroplane can fly to the sky .)

Kapal terbang itu boleh terbang ke langit.

(e) He is clever boy.

(He is a clever boy.)

Dia budak pandai.

(f) The monkey can climb on tree.

(The monkey can climb the tree.)

Monyet itu boleh memanjat pokok.

(g) Sick people go to hospital.

(Sick people go to the hospital.)

Orang sakit pergi ke hospital.

(h) Kangaroo can jump.

(A kangaroo can jump.)

Kanggaru boleh melompat.

(ii) Examples of errors in 'omission of Be as auxiliary and as main

verb':

(a) The train very long.

(The train is very long.)

Kerata api itu panjang.

(b) I very cold every Christmas.

(I am very cold every Christmas.)

Saya berasa sejuk pada setiap Hari Krismas.

(c) I very happy every day.

(I am very happy every day.)

Saya berasa gembira setiap hari.

(d) Aini went to the clinic because she sick.

(Aini went to the clinic because she was sick.)

Aini pergi ke klinik kerana dia sakit.

(e) I very happy because tomorrow is my birthday.

(I am very happy because tomorrow is my birthday.)

Saya sangat gembira kerana esok adalah hari lahir saya.

(f) My radio made in America.

(My radio is made in America.)

Radio saya dibuat di America.

(g) I so happy.

(I am so happy.)

Saya sangat gembira.

(h) The baby can cry when he hungry.

(The baby can cry if he is hungry.)

Bayi itu boleh menangis kalau dia lapar.

(iii) Examples of errors in 'errors in the use of pronouns':

(a) Ali went to the clinic because I'm sick.

(Ali went to the clinic because he was sick.)

Ali pergi ke klinik kerana dia sakit.

(b) Please wait for my.

(Please wait for me.)

Sila tunggu saya.

(c) She school is Sekolah Seri Puteri in Kuala Lumpur.

(Her school is Sekolah Seri Puteri in Kuala Lumpur.)

Sekolahnya ialah Sekolah Seri Puteri di Kuala Lumpur.

(d) He car is beautiful.

(His car is beautiful.)

Keretanya cantik.

(e) He name is Muhammad Hafiz.

(His name is Muhammad Hafiz.)

Namanya ialah Muhammad Hafiz.

(f) My have a new car.

(I have a new car.)

Saya mempunyai sebuah kereta.

(g) My mother is beautiful and he likes to play chess.

(My mother is beautiful and she likes to play chess.)

Ibu saya cantik dan dia suka bermain catur.

(h) He hobbies are swimming and reading.

(His hobbies are swimming and reading.)

Hobinya ialah berenang dan membaca.

Knowing the errors that are likely to be made by their students, the ESL teacher can plan his (or her) teaching strategy so that those possible errors are clearly pointed out to the students. The students will have more confidence in learning English when they make less errors that are attributable to first language transfer.

With the awareness that first language transfer interferes with the learning of English as a second language, the ESL teacher can point out the pitfalls to his (or her) students so that these transfer-associated errors are decreased considerably or eliminated. Students like to be praised for work well done. A good grade with less errors in their writing tasks will go a long way to inculcate their interest in the English Language. A less error prone piece of writing will build up the confidence of the students and lift the spirits of the teachers teaching them. If the students have prior anticipation of the errors they will make if they 'transfer' grammatical structures of their

first language to the English Language, they will be less likely to make those mistakes.

Primary students are at an impressionable age and a strong foundation for the learning of English as a second language should be laid at the primary level. As expounded by Robert Lado in "Linguistics Across Cultures", learners tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture - both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture, and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and the culture as practised by natives. If the students' foundation in English is strong, they will be more interested about the language and move on to higher levels of English in secondary and tertiary education. In tertiary education, if for example students are studying an engineering course, they are assumed to have a basic grasp of English. What is important to them is the English For Special Purposes which is technically related to their engineering course. Thus ESL teachers with an awareness and knowledge of transfer-related errors can help their students to achieve a brighter future.

5.4 Suggestions for Future Work

The sample for this study was confined to Year 4 students in two national primary schools in Kajang, Selangor. The findings may not reflect the actual state of affairs in the vernacular Chinese or Tamil primary schools. It would be interesting to conduct further research of a similar

nature in Chinese or Tamil primary schools to find out whether the results would be identical with the findings of this study.

An area where further research could be carried out is on the preparation of ESL teaching materials with transfer-related errors uppermost in the minds of the teachers. A pilot study could be carried out to test the effectiveness of these teaching materials before a full scale research is carried out in the schools. These teaching materials could be the basis for an innovative approach to ESL teaching where the first language and the culture of the students are taken into account.

A similar study could also be carried out in secondary schools to find out whether the more matured secondary students are also affected by first language transfer. In secondary schools, the classification of errors would have to be modified because secondary students, who have studied at least six years of English, are not expected to make the same type of errors as the primary students.

Another area of research could be whether the accessibility of reading materials lessen the effect of first language transfer. Two groups of students, one supplied with English reading materials and the other control group without the reading materials, would be assessed on their writing tasks. It would be interesting to see whether the group supplied with English reading materials will make less transfer-related errors than the control group.