CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

5.0   INTRODUCTION

There are four sections in this chapter. The first section consists of a summary of the study, while the second section constitutes the conclusions drawn from the findings. The third section presents the implications drawn from the study. In the fourth section, recommendations for further research are made.

5.1   SUMMARY

In this study, the types of simple past tense and past progressive tense errors found in the free-writing essay and structured test of forty Form Four Chinese students of Sekolah Menengah Tanah Merah Site 'C', a semi-rural school in the Seremban/Port Dickson district of Negeri Sembilan, were identified. These errors were then classified according to Corder's (1981) taxonomy of errors: selection errors, addition errors and omission errors. The errors were described following the grammatical rules of contemporary Standard British English. There was also an analysis of the sources of errors to explain the possible causes of errors.

n the essay, the subjects made the most number of errors in the simple past
nse, making up a total of 877 errors or 63.6%, while there were 69 errors in
e past progressive or 52.3%. The correct usage of the simple past was 502
r 36.4%. The past progressive was correctly used 63 times or 47.7% of the
tal.

he test yielded 695 errors in the simple past tense, which constituted 48.3%
of the overall number of errors. The correct usage was 51.7%. There were
169 or 81.2% incorrect usageof the past progressive tense while the correct
usage was 18.8% with 271 errors. These errors were tabulated and then
categorised into three main categories: selection errors, omission errors and
addition errors. The following table shows the distribution of errors into the
hree categories, as found in the essay and the test:

TABLE 5.1 % Distribution of Error Categories in the Essay and the Test

Error Types	Essay (% distribution)		Test (% distribution)	
	Simple Past Tense	Past Progressive Tense	Simple Past Tense	Past Progressive Tense
1.Selection	74.0	29.0	100.0	78.0
2.Addition	18.1	0	0	0
3.Omission	7.9	71.0	0	22.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

An examination of Table 5.1 indicates that the highest percentage of the simple
past tense errors in the essay is found in the selection category, which

constituted 74% of the total number of errors, followed by 18.1% for addition errors and 7.9% for omission errors. For the past progressive tense, the highest occurrence of errors in the essay is in the omission category, which constituted 71% of the total number of errors, followed by the selection category constituting 29% of the total number of errors. There were no errors in the addition category.

The test for the simple past tense yielded 100% of the total number of errors in the selection category. No errors were found in the addition and omission categories. The highest occurrence of errors in the test for the past progressive tense is found to be in the selection category, which constituted 78% of the total number of past progressive tense errors, followed by errors in the omission category, which yielded 22% of the total number of errors. There were no errors committed in the addition category.

The highest percentage of errors in the simple past tense is found in the selection category, both for the essay and the test. The past progressive tense, too, has the highest occurrence of errors in the selection category for the test. This indicates that students faced a serious problem in choosing the correct choice of tense in their sentences.

In the essay, the past progressive tense has more errors in the omission category, compared to the selection category. The error that figured

rominently in the students' answers was the omission of the auxiliary BE, both
n the essay and the test. This could be due to ignorance or the lack of
nowledge of the function of auxiliary BE.

.2 CONCLUSION

From the analysis of data in this study, several conclusions could be drawn.
The findings revealed that for some error types, there were more errors made
n the free-writing mode than the structured test, while for other types of errors,
here were more errors committed by the students in the test compared to the
essay.

A high percentage of the selection errors (use of simple present for simple
past) were in the essay (78.6%) than in the test (32.4%). More than twice as
many errors were committed in the essay than in the test. This could probably
be due to the fact that students were not consciously aware of using the verbs
in the simple present tense as they were concentrating more on the contents of
the essay rather than grammar.

The addition errors of the simple past tense occurred only in the essay but not
in the test. The possible reason for this could be that in the test, students were
provided with the base form of the verb in parenthesis. So, students just had to
change the base form of the verb to the simple past.

he omission errors of the simple past also occurred only in the essay. This
ould be attributed to students not being aware that in writing sentences in
nglish, the subject is followed by a verb.

 large number of selection errors in the past progressive tense is found in the
est compared to the essay. Very few errors are found in the essay. The total
umber of past progressive selection errors in the test is 912, compared to only
0 errors in the essay. There were so few errors in the essay because
tudents could have avoided using the past progressive structures. In the test,
owever, students were 'forced' to produce the past progressive structures,
ence the high frequency of errors.

he analysis further revealed that the highest percentage of errors for the
imple past tense is in the selection category, both for the essay and the test.
he past progressive, too, has the highest occurrence of errors in this category
or the test. Students find difficulty in selecting the correct choice of tense in
heir sentences.

The highest frequency of selection errors of the simple past tense in the essay
s in the use of the simple present tense for the simple past tense. This could
be attributed to redundancy reduction and phonological reasons. In the test,
he highest occurrence of selection errors of the simple past is in the incorrect

se of verb forms. Errors revealed students' ignorance and lack of knowledge
n this part of grammar.

n the test, the highest frequency of selection errors of the past progressive
ense is in the use of the simple past tense for past progressive tense. This
ndicates that students probably do not understand the concept of time, that
he past progressive tense expresses an action that is in progress at a point of
ime in the past.

The findings in this study revealed that the errors committed by students could
e attributed to interlingual and intralingual factors. Some examples of
nterlingual errors found in the data are illustrated below:

.   Subject-verb agreement errors because the verb in Mandarin does not
        give a correlation between person and number.

ii.   The omission of BE as a copula because the students probably used
        the grammatical pattern of Mandarin to write in English. Since the verb
        BE is nonexistent in Mandarin, it was totally omitted by the students.

iii.   The use of the simple present tense instead of the simple past tense.
        This could be attributed to the fact that in Mandarin, the verb stem

always remains unchanged while tense forms would be indicated by other words (Wong, 1992).

v.   Omission of auxiliary BE in the past progressive tense due to the absence of auxiliary BE in Mandarin.

It is found that not all the errors could be due to mother tongue interference. Many of the errors could be attributed to intralingual factors such as the students attempting to build hypotheses about the target language, and strategies the students used in learning the target language which reflect the general characteristics of rule learning such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules, and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply. The following are some examples of intralingual errors found in the data:

.   Use of the past progressive for simple past due to false concepts hypothesized.

i.   Use of the simple present for simple past due to redundancy reduction.

ii.   Use of incorrect verb forms due to overgeneralisation and ignorance of rule restrictions.

iv.   Use of –ing form for simple past due to ignorance of rule restrictions.

v.   Use of to-infinitive for simple past as a result of overgeneralisation.

vi.   Use of adjective for a verb due to overgeneralisation.

vii.   Addition of BE before the simple past verb as a result of overgeneralisation, incomplete application of rules, ignorance of rule restrictions and false concepts hypothesized.

viii. Use of simple past for past progressive due to ignorance of rule restrictions.

ix.   Incorrect spelling due to ignorance of rule restrictions.

x.   Use of present progressive for past progressive as a result of incomplete application of rules.

The other source of language learners' errors could also be due carelessness on the part of the students.

The findings in this study show that there were more intralingual errors committed by the students as a result of overgeneralisation, incomplete

application of rules, ignorance of rule restrictions and false concepts hypothesized rather than interference from the L1 structure. This is in line with the findings of other studies which show that only a small percentage of second language errors could be caused by language transfer (Dulay and Burt, 1974; Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982; Gass and Selinker, 1993). Nevertheless, the L1 does have an influence on L2 learning.

5.3 IMPLICATIONS

The findings from this study present a realistic picture of the problems that students face in the use of the simple past tense and the past progressive tense. The following are some implications for more effective language teaching and learning of the tenses:

1. Provide meaningful explanations to the uses of the simple past tense and the past progressive tense by using short texts instead of single sentences in isolation, so that students can see how the tenses function in discourse.

2. Provide more emphasis and focused practice on the simple past and past progressive tenses so that students will have a better understanding of these forms.

. Integrate pronunciation and listening practice into the grammar lesson to help students hear the different sounds and learn to pronounce correctly.

. Encourage students to discover the simple past and progressive rules for themselves, which is one effective way of helping them to get to grips with the two forms.

5. Design some preliminary exercises to help the students recognise the regular from the irregular verbs in the simple past tense.

6. Have spelling awareness exercise to help students be aware of the spelling rules of the irregular verbs and the –*ing* participle.

7. Create an awareness in students about the differences between the verb structures of Mandarin and English.

8. Make it compulsory for all students to obtain a passing grade at the SPM (national examination) level so that students will treat this subject seriously.

Another implication for teaching is in the area of error correction. According to Edge (1989), correction is a part of teaching and the aim is to support learners by giving feedback. Although teachers play an active role in correcting errors, they should not dominate the correction procedures as error correction can be

one   by   both   teacher   and   student (Hendrickson, 1978; Harmer, 1991).
The following are recommendations for some error correction techniques:

.   Introduce self-correction and peer-correction to focus students' attention on errors as this will provide students with an opportunity to learn from their own mistakes, as well as to help build their self-confidence and foster learning by discovering and sharing (peer-correction). This will also result in students having greater control of the written language (Cohen, cited in Leki, 1991).

2.   When marking errors, provide clues on how students can correct their own errors, such as underlining a word or providing a written tip, bracketing a misplaced word or phrase and indicating its proper place in a sentence, crossing out a superfluous word and providing a correct form or structure of an incorrect word or phrase (Hendrickson, 1980).

3.   Identify errors that occur frequently in the students' work and ask them to search out and correct their own high-frequency errors before submitting their work.

4.   Distribute sentences or short paragraphs containing common error types most often committed by students. Then, get students to locate, identify and correct the errors.

5.   Don't try to mark all errors but decide which errors to deal with (Raimes, 1983).

6.   Look for what the students have done correctly as they need to have it pointed out that they have demonstrated knowledge of the grammatical feature and that they can use the correct form (Raimes, 1983)

7.   Establish a set of symbols for indicating clearly identifiable errors (Raimes, 1983).

Although teachers might have already carried out some of the activities suggested above, yet errors may still persist in spite of further explanation or instruction, as errors are a natural occurrence in the process of acquiring competence and mastery in a language. Thus, teachers need to acknowledge that errors are an integral part of language development.

5.4   SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The findings in this study seem to suggest several lines for further research:

1.   A study into other types of verb errors such as the present tense and the perfect tense could be carried out.

2.   A study into verb errors committed in the question forms and the negatives could be carried out.

3.   A comparison of errors made by Chinese students of rural area with errors made by Chinese students of town area could be carried out.

4.   A comparison of errors made by Chinese students of low proficiency, average proficiency and high proficiency.

5.   A pre-test could be carried out at the beginning of the year and a post-test at the end of the year to see the error types that students commit after having gone through specific grammar instruction.

6.   A comparison of the error types that students commit as a result of implicit and explicit grammar instruction.

7.   Using different test methods such as the multiple-choice test and other grammatical tests to elicit verbs could be carried out.