

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a brief summary of the findings, discusses some implications and offers some recommendations. The findings have revealed that Malay learners of German find articles to be an area of German grammar which is problematic for them. The results indicate that students have difficulty in three main categories, that is, choice of articles, the agreement between the article and the noun, and the use of preposition and article in the contracted form.

6.1 Summary of Findings and Pedagogical Implications

This study attempts to answer the following research questions (RQ):

- iv. What are the types of errors made by students when using German articles?
- v. What are the possible causes for the errors?
- vi. Is there interference from Malay, the students' mother tongue and from English, their second language? If so, to what extent?

6.1.1 RQ 1: What are the types of errors made by students when using German articles?

The analysis of the results has shown that 39.71% of the students made errors in the choice of German articles used (refer to Table 5.2). For example, instead of using the *negativer Artikel*, they used the definite or indefinite articles, and so on. The absence of agreement in gender between the article and the noun and between the article and the

case is also a major error. From the findings of this study, the types of errors made by the students when using German articles can be put into 4 main categories:

- i. use of the wrong type of articles
- ii. no agreement in gender between - the article and the noun
- the article and the case
- iii. wrong use of the contracted form (preposition + definite article)
- iv. “pronoun and zero article”

6.1.2 RQ 2: What are the possible causes for the errors?

It is important that the source of the error is identified first, before it can be described and explained. Unfortunately, it is not always easy to do this as more often than not, there is more than one possible cause of errors. The errors made by the students could have been intralingual due to ignorance about grammatical rules or the incomplete application of these rules (such as in items 13, 28, and many others). Some might have been interlingual, an error caused by the negative transfer of the students' second language (English), such as the errors made in items 13, 22, and 28. Or it could have been caused by the influence of spoken German. Very often the endings (such as *'en'* from *'keinen'* or *'einen'*) will be omitted in spoken German (in an informal context). The students might have been so used to the spoken version and did not use the correct form of the declension of the articles when it came to writing.

To determine whether the errors made by the students were due to their ignorance of the agreement in gender between the article and the noun or between the case and the noun is not an easy task. For example, in the case of item 2, the correct answer is *'die'*

(a definite article for a feminine singular noun in the accusative) and the two other given answers are 'den' and 'der'. 'Den' can be a definite article for a masculine singular noun in the accusative or a definite plural noun in the dative. 'Der' can be the definite article for a masculine singular noun in the nominative, or a singular feminine noun in the dative or the genitive, or a plural noun in the genitive. Other examples include incorrect answers for items 10, 35, 44 and 50.

The various incorrect answers provided by students for items 12, 13, 29, 33 and 36 indicate a rather weak understanding of the use of an adverb such as 'leider' and a particle like 'noch' and a weak command of the vocabulary. The adverb 'leider' and particle 'noch' in these items require the use of various declensions of the *negativer Artikel*.

The students' own carelessness is also a possible cause for the occurrence of errors. Based on the interview with Teacher B at GMI and also on the results of the test, this could be the reason why Subject 21 committed his errors. Although clear instructions were given before the test was administered by Teacher B (that they should only fill in the blanks with articles), Subject 21 had written 'ihre' (her/their) for item 45 and 'mir' (to me) for item 21. He had also not given any answers at all for 5 items (items 4, 7, 9, 12 and 13). Although omission of answers were not considered as errors, his action indicated his carelessness, as clear instruction were given both orally (by teacher B) and in writing (on the test paper).

6.1.3 RQ 3: Is there interference from Malay, the students' mother tongue and from English, their second language? If so, to what extent?

The findings of this study (items 28, 31, 13, 17, 37 and 44) indicated that there was interference to a certain extent from the students' mother tongue (Malay) and the second language (English).

Findings revealed that the errors committed by the students in the use of German articles might indicate other problems that students have in other areas of German grammar. One instance can be seen in item 18 (as discussed earlier in 5.2.3), where the incorrect answers provided might indicate that they have problems with:

- i. the use of the formal and informal 'you'
- ii. the case system
- iii. the use of prepositions
- iv. vocabulary

The wrong use of the form of the article caused by the students' inability to master or understand the case system could bring confusion when it comes to sentence structures.

- i. Der Lehrer ruft den Jungen an.

The teacher phones the boy.

Cikgu menelefon budak lelaki itu.

- ii. Den Jungen ruft der Lehrer an.

*'The boy phones the teacher.'

*'Budak itu menelefon cikgu.'

In German sentence structures, it is possible to have the object before the subject (ii), but the sentence still conveys the same meaning as in (i) because the case system enables the identification of the subject or object of the sentence clearly. This feature is not found either in Malay or English in active sentences. The second sentence in Malay and English would convey a totally different meaning from the first sentence.

The findings also revealed that quite a number of students have problems with the gender of the nouns (Table 5.3.1). Malay nouns have no gender, unlike German nouns. The students were unsure whether the nouns were masculine, feminine, neuter or even plural. The amount of errors committed by the students could be reduced tremendously, if they knew the gender of the nouns.

6.2 Recommendations

Due to the fact that quite a number of the errors committed by the students in the use of German articles were caused by the absence of agreement in gender between the article and the noun, it is therefore of great importance for the students to learn the gender of all the nouns at the same time as when they learn a new noun. German language teachers might want to help their learners by constantly reminding or pointing out this fact to students. This could also be enhanced further with lots of drilling exercises and tests to enable learners to commit the gender of the nouns to memory. As in most grammar learning, memorization of rules is crucial in bringing success in language acquisition. If the students are receptive to learning through language games, games like “Quartett” (or Happy Family) and Domino which focuses on articles can be used to help students too. Students might find it easier learning through games and at the same time having fun, thus they would find learning less stressful.

As a warm-up activity or revision of vocabulary, teachers can start their class by dividing the students into three groups for the three different genders (*der, die, das*). Each group will have an action allocated to them, e.g. *der* will stand up, *die* will squat down and *das* will put up both hands. Then the teacher will just called out a noun that they have learnt in the previous class, e.g. “*Brot*” (*das*), “*Abendessen*” (*das*), “*Käse*” (*der*), or “*Wurst*” (*die*) and the group being called out (based on the gender of the noun)

will perform the action. This makes it more fun for learning, especially for school children.

Since the contracted form of preposition + definite article is also a difficult structure to master, teachers can ask the students to match picture cards to phrases. This is especially helpful when it comes to teaching students about changing prepositions.

Below are some examples for this grammar item:

A picture of someone going to the cinema	<i>ins Kino gehen</i>
A picture of someone in the cinema	<i>im Kino sein</i>
A picture of someone driving to the sea(side)	<i>ans Meer fahren</i>
A picture of someone at the seaside	<i>am Meer sein</i>
A picture of someone putting a book on top of a shelf	<i>aufs Regal legen</i>
A picture of a book lying on top of a shelf	<i>auf dem Regal liegen</i>

Apart from what has been suggested above, German language teachers can also use the errors committed by their students to find out if these errors were the result of the students' other grammatical problems. Once the teachers have identified this, they can then use them as items to be included into their material preparation for remedial work with the weaker learners.

Most of the German books being used in Malaysia classroom emphasize on communicative teaching / learning. Very often, in order to finish the syllabus on time, grammar is not taught explicitly in the classroom. Maybe the number of hours per week allocated for German lessons could be increased to enable the teachers to have more time to spend on these problem areas in the class syllabus.

Due to the complicated rules and intricacies of German articles and how they are closely related to many other aspects of the grammar, there is still ample room for extensive studies on the use of German articles with the aim of improving students'

learning of the language. Since this study is only on Malay students, further studies on learners of other ethnic groups could also be done to find out if the problems are the same or different.

6.3 Conclusion

It is hoped that this study has helped to shed some light on the learning of a small area of the German language, i.e. by identifying some of the possible causes of learners' errors in the use of articles. This is important because German articles are closely related to other aspects of grammar. Errors in the use of German articles are not always caused by the students' inability to decide which type of article to use. More often than not, at the root of the problem is the learners' ignorance of the gender of the noun, or the case system, as indicated by the high percentage of errors caused by the non-agreement in gender between the article and the noun, or between the article and the case. This can be rectified by raising awareness to the common errors often made by learners with the hope that their language learning endeavours be made easier.