CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE PRESENT STUDY

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1.1   Introduction

The aim of all language teaching including English language should be good speech, that is, to enable the learner to speak the language fluently and correctly. From the ability to speak can be developed the writing skill, but being able to use the language well orally must come first. Therefore, for years, there have been many studies on the process of first language acquisition and second language acquisition. Findings about first language acquisition have been adapted to foreign language learning and it has been concluded that the process works in a similar way. Children learning their native tongue make many mistakes and this is a natural part of the language acquisition process. It is something common in language learning whereby all learners make mistakes and commit errors. For example, in this research, the learners were influenced by their mother tongue in learning English as a second language.

Furthermore, studies on second language (L2) learner writing have used various measures of linguistic accuracy which include morphological, syntactic and lexical accuracy to answer a variety of research questions. Second Language Acquisition research, often asks questions about learner's interlanguage under different conditions. Is a learner more accurate in some conditions than others, and if so, what causes that difference? For example, if a learner is paying more attention in one condition and produces language with fewer errors, which might inform us about some of the cognitive processes in L2 production.

Researchers studying writing have asked similar questions, for example, does a L2 writer's accuracy change under certain conditions? Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992), for example, examined ESL students writing under 2 conditions: translation from their L1 and direct composition. Kroll (1990) examined ESL students' writing on timed essays. These studies give us information not only about how ESL students write, but also factors which are related to good writing. Such studies will be reviewed in Chapter 2.

In Malaysia, English plays an important role as a second language in schools, both at primary and secondary level. At secondary level, the language learners are expected to have reached the stage of correct speller. Most learners in Malaysia use English as their second language other than their native language. However, Malaysian learners lack knowledge of standard spelling in English language especially. This is because of the spelling of English words are different from the way the words are pronounced. Another factor in spelling error is the difference in mental age and academic age. This can be based on their basic English words knowledge. The environment also can contribute as one of the factors in second language learning. This is because the English language is learnt in school only during the English hour or lesson. In the home environment, the learner's mother or father use only their mother tongue as a tool of their communication. Hence the opportunity to use and practice the English language is very limited.

Errors versus Mistakes

In the 1950's, the behaviourist learning theory described language learning as habit formation and explained why the second language learners made errors. Therefore, in second language learning, Corder observes that the learner's error are indicative both of the state of the learner's knowledge and of the ways in which a second language is learned. Other than the Linguistic Approach, other factors also influencing the learner's language use which can be considered as language transfer, intralingual interference, the effects of the sociolinguistic situation, the modality of exposure to the target language and the modality of production, the age of the learner, the instability of the learner's linguistic system and the effects of the inherent difficulty of the particular item being learned.

Corder defines errors (in competence) and mistakes (in performance). Corder also introduced the distinction between systematic and unsystematic errors. Unsystematic errors occur in one's native language; Corder calls these "mistakes" and states that they are not significant to the process of language learning. He keeps the term "error" for the occurrence of systematic errors in second language. The issue of error or mistakes made by the pupils explains the pupil inability to use the appropriate grammatical structures, semantic categories and other linguistic structure. Many errors are due to the fact that the learner uses structures from his/her native language. For example spelling errors, I *wan en apple* (I want an apple), *paragrough*- paragraph etc. Language learning, like any other learning process, involves the making of errors which develops the learner ability in every stages of learning. In order to understand the process of second language learning, the errors made by the pupils in the process of constructing a new system of language should be analyzed carefully.

Like reading, spelling is a written language skill that draws upon an individual's repertoire of linguistic knowledge, including phonological awareness, and knowledge of orthography, vocabulary, morphological and semantic relationships, and mental orthographic images (Apel & Masterson,2001; Apel, Masterson,& Niessen, 2004). A deficit in any one of word study knowledge will manifest as pattern of misspelling. Misspellings may be due to either typing errors (e.g. typing *teh* for *the*), or lack of knowledge of the correct spelling. Whether or not a word is misspelled may depend on context, as is the case with American / British English distinctions. Misspelling can also be a matter of opinion when variant spellings are accepted by some and not by others. For example "miniscule" (for "minuscule") is a misspelling to many, and yet it is listed as an acceptable variant in some dictionaries.

Approaches to study of errors

Based on this issue, there are various approaches to the study of errors. It can be divided into two, namely: 1) the linguistic approaches and 2) non-linguistic approaches. The linguistic approaches refer to Contrastive Analysis Approach and Error Analysis Approach, while the non- linguistic approaches refers to Sociological Approach and Psychological Approach. In this research, the focus is on linguistic approaches and mother tongue influence that is where the learner will use sounds existing in their native language when producing L2 sounds. This situation may occur because of the lack of knowledge of standard spelling and the fact that English words may be spelt differently from the way the words are pronounced. For example: boat-*bot*, know-*no*. Other factors such mass media influence, for example, the influence of text messaging (SMS) will also be studied. For

example: have-hv, cannot- x, and two/to - 2. The learner creates or invents spelling of his/her own. In this research, the researcher wants to study the causes of spelling errors and to know how far the learner is in terms of the target language (TL) in learning the language has progressed. This is because errors functions as valuable feedback in order to explore and understand learner errors in spelling.

Error analysis

Until the late sixties, the prominent theory regarding the issue of second language learning was behaviouristic, which suggested that the learning was largely a question of acquiring a set of new language habits. Therefore, errors were considered as being the result of the persistence of existing mother tongue habits in the new language. Error analysis, a branch of applied linguistics, emerged in the sixties to demonstrate that the learner errors were not only because of the learners' native language but also they reflected some universal learning strategies, as a reaction to contrastive analysis theory, which considered language transfer as the basic process of second language learning as what behavioristic theory suggested. The field of error analysis in SLA was established in the 1970s by S. P. Corder and colleagues. Error analysis was an alternative to contrastive analysis, an approach influenced by behaviorism through which applied linguists sought to use the formal distinctions between the learners' first and second languages to predict errors. Error analysis showed that contrastive analysis was unable to predict a great majority of errors, although it is more valuable aspects have been incorporated into the study of language transfer. A key finding of error analysis has been that many learner errors are produced by learners making faulty inferences about the rules of the new language.

From the beginning, error analysis was beset with methodological problems. In particular, the above typologies are problematic: from linguistic data alone, it is often impossible to reliably determine what kind of error a learner is making. Also, error analysis can deal effectively only with learner production (speaking and writing) and not with learner reception (listening and reading). Furthermore, it cannot account for learner use of communicative strategies such as avoidance, in which learners simply do not use a form with which they are uncomfortable. For these reasons, although error analysis is still used to investigate specific questions in SLA, the quest for an overarching theory of learner errors has largely been abandoned. In the mid-1970s, Corder and others moved on to a more wide-ranging approach to learner language, known as interlanguage.

Error analysis is closely related to the study of error treatment in language teaching. This can be seen in the basis of Error analysis itself, whereby Selinker adopted from interlingual which refers to the separateness of a second language learners system that has a structurally intermediate status between the native and target language learner. And also reflects the psychological process of learning and language learning. Today, the study of errors is particularly relevant for focus on form teaching methodology.

Therefore, in any work of error analysis, the aim is always to pin-point the main areas in which mistakes are made and to attempt to classify these mistakes in the hope that by doing so, the rectifying of errors will be easier. In this research, the researcher aims to identify the type of errors that can be found in the learners writing and factors that can cause the spelling errors made in their writing. By finding out the spelling errors and factors, the researcher hopes to list down several ideas to improve the teaching and learning of the English language.

Interlanguage

A number of terms have been coined to describe the perspective that stresses the legitimacy of learners' second language systems. The best known of these is interlanguage, a term that Selinker (1972) adapted from Weinreich's (1953) term "interlingual". Interlanguage refers to the separateness of a second language learner's system, a system that has a structurally intermediate status between the native and target languages. The studies in interlanguage has brought about Error Analysis. Mistakes that a person made in the process of SLA needed to be analyzed carefully for their possible held some keys to the understanding of the process of SLA.

Interlanguage scholarship seeks to understand learner language on its own terms, as a natural language with its own consistent set of rules. Interlanguage scholars reject, at least for heuristic purposes, the view of learner language as merely an imperfect version of the target language. Interlanguage is perhaps best viewed as an attitude toward language acquisition, and not a distinct discipline. By the same token, interlanguage work is a vibrant microcosm of linguistics. It is possible to apply an interlanguage perspective to learners' knowledge of L2 sound systems (interlanguage phonology), and language-use norms found among learners (interlanguage pragmatics).

By describing the ways in which learner language conforms to universal linguistic norms, interlanguage research has contributed greatly to our understanding of linguistic universals in SLA. Researchers have found a very consistent order in the acquisition of first language structures by children, and this has drawn a great deal of interest from SLA scholars. Considerable effort has been devoted to testing the "identity hypothesis", which asserts that first-language and second-language acquisition conform to the same patterns.

This has not been confirmed, probably because second-language learners' cognitive and affective states are so much more advanced. However, orders of acquisition in SLA do often resemble those found in first language acquisition, and may have common neurological causes.

Spelling error

Spelling is the writing of a word or words with the necessary letters and diacritics present in an accepted standard order. It is one of the elements of orthography and a prescriptive element of alphabetic languages. Most spellings attempt to approximate a transcribing of the sounds of the language into alphabetic letters; however, completely phonetic spellings are often the exception, due to drifts in pronunciations over time and irregular spellings adopted through common usage.

Spelling is a highly complex task that is gradually mastered over a period of time as an individual becomes acquainted with the properties and purposes of written language. Spelling involves the use of strategies, which may vary according to the words being attempted and the knowledge that the writer has acquired through experiences with words. (Faye Bolton & Diane Snowball)

There are two main reasons for not being able to spell: 1) weak visual memory and 2) weak auditory analysis(Mike Torbe, 1977). This is to compare with a good speller who

1) hears a word and can associate the sounds with the right letters.
2) can break a word into its parts and knows how to write the parts down.
3) probably sees an image of the word in his mind, and reads it off as he spells.

A poor speller with a weak visual memory has a fairly clear idea of which symbol represents which sound and does not remember how the word should look, and gets confused when he tries to write it down and also he is not necessarily a poor reader. His spelling errors will be recognizable as intended word such as cof-cough, entad – entered. A speller with auditory analysis cannot say which letter symbols represent which sound. The speller also cannot hear what the constituent sounds of a word are. He makes random and arbitrary guesses in spelling the words. His spelling errors may be unrecognizable as the intended word, for example *girf-* giraffe, *haus-* house etc.

Richard Gentry (1982) also described the developmental stages learners go through in learning to spell as in stages of prephonemic spelling, early phonemic spelling, phonetic spelling, transitional spelling and standard spelling. This will be explained in detail in Chapter 2. Therefore, in this research, the researcher aims to study error through an analysis of the respondent writing in English language. This is because writing requires conscious effort and much practice in composing, developing, and analyzing ideas. Students writing in a second language are also faced with social and cognitive challenges related to second language acquisition. However, language proficiency and competence underlies the ability to write in the second language in a fundamental way. Error(s) in writing in relation to particular aspects of second language acquisition and theories of the writing process in the First language and Second language. It can be said that focus on the writing process as a pedagogical tool is only appropriate for second language learners if attention is given to linguistic development, and if learners are able to get sufficient and effective feedback with regard to their errors in writing.

The ability to write well is not a naturally acquired skill; it is usually learned or culturally transmitted as a set of practices in formal instructional settings or other environments. Writing skills must be practiced and learned through experience. Writing also involves composing, which implies the ability either to tell or retell pieces of information in the form of narratives or description or to transform information into new texts, as in expository or argumentative writing. It is undoubtedly the act of composing which can create problems for students, especially for those writing in a second language (L2) in academic contexts. Formulating new ideas can be difficult because it involves transforming or reworking information, which is much more complex than writing. Therefore, errors in writing can be identified in the students' writing. Students writing in their second language have to also acquire proficiency in the use of the language as well as writing strategies, techniques and skills.

Language transfer is another important factor related to writing error. Transfer is defined as the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously acquired (Odlin, 1989). Input and interaction also play important roles in the writing process, especially in classroom settings. Therefore, writing in a second language is a complex process involving the ability to communicate in L2 (learner output) and the ability to construct a text in order to express one's ideas effectively in writing.

Whether an error, mistake or awkward discourse can occur for a variety for reasons, for example, learners may translate from L1, or they may try out what they assume is a legitimate structure of the target language, although hindered by insufficient knowledge of correct usage. In the learning process, they often experience native language interference

from developmental stages of interlanguage or from nonstandard elements in spoken dialects (a common occurrence in students writing in their native language as well). In addition, learners are often unsure of what they want to express, which would cause them to make mistakes in any language.

It is hoped that the output of this research will raise the awareness of teachers as to the reality of transfer in second language acquisition. Therefore, the English teacher will be able to be more effective when considering the differences between the native and target language and consequently point out to students the errors that may arise from those differences. The factors which influence these errors are not only linguistic but also cultural, social and personal factors that interact with transfer: proficiency levels in second language, literary skills in First language, social factors, individuals' variations.

1.2   The purpose of the study

The purposes of the study are:

1) to identify the spelling errors that Malaysian students make

   English language has become an important part of the Malaysian curriculum covering the four skills of reading, speaking, listening and writing. By identifying the spelling errors, it is hoped that the teaching and learning process can be improved.

2) to classify the spelling errors made by the secondary students in Form 2

   The classification of the spelling errors made by the secondary students can help the teacher in improving their method in teaching English language especially writing and looking into a systematic analysis of the spelling errors made by the learner. By

understanding the categories of spelling errors, it is hoped that teachers can help students improve in spelling.

3) to identify the causes of these spelling errors made by the Form 2 students

By identifying the causes of these spelling errors, this can contribute to the efforts to overcome the problems faced in spelling and writing in the English language.

1.3   Research Questions

This research is based on the questions listed below:

1) What are the spelling errors made by Malay secondary students when writing in English?

After marking and reviewing the students writing, the researcher found that there are several spelling errors made by them such as omission or addition of letter, irregular letter combination, mispronunciation spelling, dialect or language transfer, wrong use of past tense, the use of first language in second language writing, and also the influence of text messaging or email. Furthermore, most of the students were influenced by their first language as English is their second language and minimal and limited vocabulary in English was used.

2) What types of spelling error can be identified in the students' writing?

The type of spelling errors that can be found include omission or addition of letter, irregular letter combination, mispronunciation spelling, dialect or language transfer, wrong use of the past tense, the use of first language in

second language writing, and also the influence of text messaging (SMS) or email. These types of spelling errors can be found in the student's writing.

3) What are the causes of these spelling errors?

The causes of the spelling errors that can be found in the writing of essay can be attributed to the influence of their mother tongue, which is Bahasa Malaysia. Mother tongue is the language that is acquired from birth. Learning English language is an addition in their second language and it help them to understand and communicate with others. This also shows that spelling in English words is a challenge for Malays learners as we all make mistakes when attempting to learn spelling as it is a process of development to learn second language. The students are also influenced by text messaging or the new media, for example texting on hand phones has effects on the students spelling and writing.

1.4   The Limitations of the Study

This study involves 100 Form 2 Malay students. The students are to write one essay of 120 words. In addition, this study is conducted only in one secondary school which is located in Kuala Lumpur. This is because the research focuses on spelling errors in a written essay and the target groups are Malay students who have Bahasa Malaysia as their mother tongue.

Aim of study and hypothesis

In this research, the researcher will focus and examine the written spelling error made by Malay students in writing an essay in the English language, which is their second language. The hypothesis here is that the spelling errors can be attributed to mother tongue influence, which is Bahasa Malaysia and other factors which influence their writing are their carelessness and lack of proficiency.

Respondents of research

The table below shows the data of the students who are involved in this research at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Wangsa Maju, Seksyen 2, Kuala Lumpur.

No.	Name of Classes	Number of students	Races
1	Amanah	27	Malay
2	Gigih	17	Malay
3	Rancangan Khas	17	Malay
4	Nilai	13	Malay
5	Wangsa	26	Malay

1.5   Methodology

In this research, the researcher identifies and classifies the spelling errors made by the Malay learner in their English writing. The data will be collected through the students' written essay. The essay will be marked by the researcher and the errors are then audited by an English tutor in MSU (Management and Science University). The researcher has at least 5 years experience in marking essays. After the essays are marked, a frequency count of spelling errors will be carried out in order to tabulate the errors made by the students in their English writing. In the next phase, the researcher will analyze the data to study the impact of their mother tongue on the spelling in English as a second language.

1.6   Conclusion

Looking into the problems of writing, the first criticism to be brought up is always that of poor spelling. In spite of the advancements in teaching methods, improvement in spelling appears to be lagging behind. The need for correct spelling in written works is necessary because through writing, people are making communication easier in the form of written messages, letters and others. It also establishes to a large extent a person's educational level. In order to minimize spelling error in writing, we can follow the same principles in reading, where in writing activities learner automatically use the words that are familiar and of interest to them and has knowledge of the words rather than words that are rarely used. Where correct spelling is emphasized only in a formal spelling period, there will be little transfer to ordinary language activities. Spelling needs to be stressed in all written work, not through the marking of errors. This will develop other attitudes of neatness and accuracy in language use and encourage for positive progress as spelling is a

tool of communication where the more they write, the more practice they get in minimizing their spelling errors.

In this chapter (Chapter 1), the focus was on the background of the present study and research. Chapter 2 will focus on the relevant review of literature linked to the research. In Chapter 3, a presentation of the methodology, subjects and materials is done. The data is analyzed and interpreted in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 presents the research conclusions drawn from the findings and suggestion for further research.