

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Malaysia is a multicultural country which has a diversity of languages used in its society. As a result of this, the classrooms are also influenced by this multilingual practice. Back in the 1960s, English played an important role in Malaysian society and was used as the language of instruction in the educational system. The scenario changed in the 1990s when the Malay language gradually replaced English as the language of instruction as the country pursued a nationalist language policy. In 2003, English became the language of instruction in mathematics and the science subjects in an attempt to improve the mastery of the language among students. Yet, the mastery of English among Malaysian learners is still lacking. Extensive research has been carried out to find out the reasons for the lack of mastery of English in Malaysia itself.

This study firstly, will begin by giving a brief description of the historical background of English and Malay. English is a Germanic language of the Indo-European group. Based on the reconstruction of Proto-Germanic, the Germanic branch languages have evolved into German, English, Dutch, African, Yiddish and Scandinavian languages. English was influenced by two waves. First, in the 8th and 9th centuries, the Germanic language of Scandinavian origin occupied various parts of Britain. Later in the 11th century, the Normans took over. The Germanic invaders occupied Scotland, Wales, Cornwall and Ireland. Therefore, these invaders' language assisted in the formation of what is known as Old English. Furthermore, English was also greatly influenced by Norse, the language of the Vikings in the east.

On the other hand, in order to know the historical background of the Malay language, Asmah (1985) states that we have to look at the people or speakers of the language. There are various theories about the origin of the Malays. The most significant account is the one that posits that the Malays come from central Asia based on the artefacts found in the caves of Perak. Moreover, the evidence found in vocabularies from cognates of Malay, Iban, Semambuk, and Paitan languages share certain similarities. These similarities reveal that the Austronesians have travelled through sea and land and decided to reside in Peninsula Malaysia while others continued their journey to other places.

The Malay language is classified under the umbrella of Austronesian languages. There are two main branches in the Austronesian languages namely, the Western Branch – the largest group, followed by Eastern Branch (Oceania). Speakers of the Western Branch are found from Famosa in the north to the Philippines islands and Maluku in the east, Timor Leste in the south and Madagascar in the west. Malay is categorized in this group. It is the most prolific in terms of development despite the fact that Indonesia has the most number of languages. Malay is the national language as well as the language of instruction in education in Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei. This fact has directly become the catalyst to the development of the Malay language.

This brief account of the historical background clearly shows that the two languages, English and Malay do not come from the same language family and are not connected. Thus, there are a lot of structural differences which can be identified and these differences have formed the main hindrances in the lack of mastery of English among Malay students. One of the practical approaches is to look at the causes when dealing with the problem of learners' lack of mastery of English.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The main concern of this study is the problem of why Malay students in Malaysia fail to use English prepositions accurately and effectively in their writing despite learning English from the very first year of school. The English language is also used in the teaching of science and mathematics. Moreover, teachers tend to think that the more exposure the learners have to English, the more proficient they would become. Such statements or impressions can neither be proved nor disproved until a research is carried out.

Generally, students are faced with two main problems when using prepositions. They have to know firstly, whether in any construction a preposition is required or not and next, which preposition to use when one is required. The first problem can be troublesome to Malay students. Certain constructions in Malay require two prepositions, whereas in English, only one preposition is needed for the same function.

For example:

English: I came here **to** study.

Malay: Saya datang **ke** sini **untuk** belajar.

In English, we use two different prepositions based on the context and this could cause confusion among Malay learners who are not yet proficient in English.

For example:

We watch a movie **at** Tanjung Golden Village Cinema.

We watch a movie **on** television.

(Note: All prepositions in both English and Malay are highlighted in this report.)

This study would discuss the use of prepositions in English and Malay using the Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis Approach. It is hoped that this study would help to explain the reasons for the errors committed by Malay learners who are learning English as a second language in Malaysia.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study aims to investigate the use of English prepositions among Malay learners in their essays. The main objectives of the study are:

1. to describe the prepositions in English and Malay;
2. to compare the similarities and differences on the use of prepositions between the two languages; and
3. to identify the English prepositions that cause problems for Malay learners.

1.4 Research Questions

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are similarities and differences on the use of prepositions between English and Malay?
2. What are the interlingual errors i.e. those errors that are caused by mother tongue interference?
3. What are the intralingual errors i.e. those errors that are non-contrastive in nature?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study provides insights to English language teachers on the types of English prepositions that are problematic to Malay learners. It will also bring about awareness of

the differences and similarities between the two languages - Malay and English - among the learners and teachers themselves. The findings will also provide useful feedback for language learners themselves, teachers, curriculum planners and textbook writers.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

Contrastive Analysis is commonly used to compare the linguistic structures of two or more languages. This approach works on the assumption that learners would find it easier to learn a second language or foreign language which has similar linguistic features with their mother tongue. When the linguistic features in the second language or foreign language are different, this would hinder their learning of that new language. Further discussion on this approach could be found in Chapter Three.

In this study, Contrastive Analysis is used to compare prepositions in English and Malay as to examine the common and different features in both languages. Then, the difference between Malay as the mother tongue and English as the target language would give insights on the interference found. We cannot discuss the interference found without bringing in Error Analysis. Contrastive Analysis is related to Error Analysis as they complement each other in the study of interference in language learning.

In order to explain the errors made by the subjects of this thesis in their essays, Error Analysis is used. Error Analysis does not limit itself in identifying interlingual errors but also other errors. In addition, Error Analysis identifies the actual errors committed by learners and through this analysis in turn helps in the preparation of effective teaching strategies.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on two aspects. The first one is on the Contrastive Analysis of English prepositions and Malay prepositions by looking into the similarities and differences in the use of prepositions of both languages. The similarities and differences in the use of prepositions are then used to predict the possible problems faced by Malay learners in learning English.

Next, this study also focuses on the errors in the use of prepositions. The researcher used Error Analysis to find out how much Malay learners understand and know how to use prepositions in English through their written essays. In this study too, the researcher hopes to find out how the use of Malay prepositions influences the learning of English. The conclusion derived cannot be applied to all Malay learners because this investigation of errors is limited to thirty Malay learners from a particular school.

For the purpose of this study, only the simple prepositions that are commonly used in both languages are examined. Despite there are other errors in the written essays of Malay learners, prepositions simple as there are posed the most problems in their essays after tenses.

1.8 Definitions of Terms

This section includes a general overview of what contrastive analysis is, what error analysis is, definitions of the other important terms associated with errors, prepositions and phrasal verbs.

1.8.1 Contrastive Analysis

In Contrastive Analysis (CA), two or more languages are contrasted in order to highlight the similarities and differences in their structures. Lado (1957:2) posits that this would enable one to predict the areas in the second language (L2) that will be difficult for learners as well as the nature of difficulties with a certain amount of accuracy. CA is a way of comparing languages in order to determine potential errors for the purpose of isolating what needs to be learned and what does not need to be learned in a second language situation.

According to Wardhaugh (1970:124), there are two positions developed – the strong version and the weak version. The strong version helps one to make predictions about learning, and thus the success of language teaching materials based on a comparison between two languages. On the other hand, the weak version starts with an analysis of learners' errors and then attempts to account for those errors on the basis of native language-target language differences.

CA assists second language teachers to understand potential errors that learners make. This understanding will help teachers to identify what needs to be learned and what is already in the learner's system. Thus, what needs to be learned will be the focus of the teaching and what is already learned will be the knowledge the learner brings to the learning situations (Banathy et. al., 1966).

1.8.2 Error Analysis

Error Analysis (EA) is a linguistics analysis which focuses on the errors made by language learners. It compares errors made in the target language (TL) with the TL itself. Richards and Sampson (1974:15) posit that EA from the pragmatic classroom-experiences,

is a means “by which the teacher assesses the learning and teaching and determines priorities for future effort.” According to Corder (1974:161-162), EA has a theoretical analysis as well as an applied analysis. The theoretical analysis helps to “elucidate what and how a learner learns when he studies L2.” And the applied analysis helps the learner “to learn more efficiently by exploiting his knowledge of his own dialect for pedagogical purposes.” Thus, the analysis of errors is both diagnostic and prognostic. It is diagnostic because it reveals to us the learner’s state of the language (Corder, 1967) at a certain point of his learning process. In addition, it is prognostic because it reveals to textbook writers and teachers which part of the learning materials needs to be reoriented based on the learners’ current errors.

1.8.3 Interference

Language learners aim to be proficient in the languages they are learning but the language learner cannot avoid the influence of his native language (NL). The NL has a strong influence on learners who have yet to acquire sufficient proficiency in the TL. The influence of the NL can be positive or negative. The negative influence includes transferring features of the NL on to the TL resulting in erroneous structures, direct translation and language switch. This is known as negative transfer or interference of the mother tongue. Ellis (1983) states that various studies done on English grammar taught as a L2 between 1971 and 1983 showed 33% of interference errors.

Selinker (1966:83) categorizes transfer into three types – positive transfer, negative transfer and neutral transfer. He defines positive transfer as language transfer that facilitates the learning of TL. On the contrary, negative transfer involves a similar process like in positive transfer except that it is an error as it deviates from the norm of the L2. Thus, the

result is an error. Finally, a neutral transfer is the process which occurs when the stringing of linguistic units by a L2 learner is sometimes correct and wrong at other times.

1.8.4 Interlanguage

Selinker (1969) first introduced the term “interlanguage” to define the linguistic stage second language learners go through in the process of mastering the target language. Interlanguage is a language which is between two languages – the source language (SL) and the target language (TL). It refers to the linguistic system which has been developed by the L2 learner when learning the TL. He has not become fully competent but is only approximating the TL, maintaining some features of his first language (L1) when speaking or writing in the TL and generating novel structures. Different terms have been coined for “interlanguage”. Nemser (1971) calls it “approximative system”, Corder (1971) names it “idiosyncratic dialect” and Selinker (1978) uses the term “language learners’ language”.

The learner’s language or interlanguage is different from both the L1 and TL systems, yet at the same time shares common features with both. One important characteristic of interlanguage is that it is systematic. In other words, it combines elements from both the L1 and the TL to create entirely new structures. The interlanguage is a reduced system compared to L1 language systems, both in the number of and complexity of rules and the number of words they contain. Another characteristic of the interlanguage system is that it is systematically variable. Here, the learner’s performance varies systematically and regresses at times to previous learning stages in informal situations. The interlanguage of the learner is also subject to fossilization, which means that he does not conform to the TL norms despite receiving years of instruction in and exposure to the standard form of TL.

There are three main approaches to the description of interlanguage system. According to Selinker (1972:206), interlanguage is a temporary grammar that is systematic and consists of rules. These rules are the product of five main cognitive processes:

- i. Overgeneralization,
- ii. Transfer of training,
- iii. Strategies of second language,
- iv. Strategies of second language communication and
- v. Language transfer

The second approach to the description of the interlanguage system was introduced by Adjemian (1976). He posits that interlanguages are natural languages yet unique in that their grammar is permeable. He differentiates the learning strategies that learners employ and the linguistic rules that are crucial in the actual language system. Adjemian (1976) states that the primary goal of linguistic research should be to describe the linguistic rules in order to reveal the features of the learners' grammar.

A different approach to the theory of the interlanguage system was adopted by Tarone (1979, 1982). She sees interlanguage as a continuum of speech styles. Learners shift between styles based on the amount of attention they pay to language form i.e. shifting progressively from a more careful style where the focus is on the language forms to the vernacular style where less attention is given to language forms.

1.8.5 Mistakes and Errors

Linguists had made a clear distinction mistakes and errors. A mistake is a performance error which is a slip, lapse (Hockett, 1948 in Corder, 1981), goof (Dulay and

Burt, 1972) or random guess. Both native language (NL) and L2 users make mistakes due to failure to use a known system correctly and not due to lack of competence. Jain (1974) sees mistakes are slips of the tongue and false starts. Corder (1973) defines mistakes as non-linguistics features such as tiredness, haste, lack of concentration, memory limitations, and strong emotions. Brown (2000) notes mistakes are the result of some temporary breakdown in producing speech as in hesitations, random deviations, and other performance lapses. Mistakes are not systematic, thus they are not significant in language learning. According to James (1998:83), a mistake can be self-corrected if it is brought to the language user's attention, while errors cannot be self-corrected.

On the other hand, an error is associated with the learner's lack of knowledge in the grammatical rules of a language. Thus, he creates erroneous sentences. They are the deviations from the correct grammatical system and reflect the learner's competence in the TL. Therefore, errors are the overt manifestations of the L2 learner's systems. They are most likely to occur repeatedly and the learner would not be able recognize it. These learners find it difficult to correct the errors. Thus, errors are systematic (Corder in Richards, 1978: 168).

According to Corder (in Richards, 1978:24), errors can be divided into two categories: the first category is unsystematic errors or slips which are usually caused by forgetting the grammatical rules and physical or psychological situations. Normally, native speakers are aware of their slips and able to correct the mistakes made. The second category is errors caused by lack of knowledge of the language code especially when learning the second or foreign language. The sources of errors can be inferred from interlanguage interference from the NL, intralingual interference within the TL, the

sociolinguistics context of communication, psycholinguistics or cognitive strategies and other affective factors.

Richards (1974:173) identifies three types of errors:

- i. interlingual errors,
- ii. intralingual errors, and
- iii. developmental errors.

1.8.6 Interlingual Errors

Interlingual errors are a significant source of information for language learners as well as teachers. The Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (1992:156) states that “interlingual errors are the result of transferring elements of the learner’s NL to the learning of the TL”. Such errors occur when there is transfer of phonological, morphological, grammatical, lexico-semantic and stylistic as well as cultural elements of the learner’s NL to the TL. To sum up, these errors are caused by the interference of the learner’s NL as supported by Duskova (1969). Richards (1974:174) sees interlingual errors as “errors caused by the interference of the learner’s mother tongue”.

1.8.7 Intralingual Errors

Interference from the learners’ own language is not the sole cause of errors. As Ellis (1997) suggests, some errors seem to be universal, reflecting the learners’ attempt to make the learning task and language use simpler. Intralingual errors may result from faulty or partial learning of the TL rather than language transfer or the influence of one TL item upon another. It is the mutual interference of items in the TL and it reflects the learner’s competence at a certain stage of learning the L2. Similarly, developmental errors are caused

by the L2 learner attempting to build up concepts and hypotheses about the TL from his limited knowledge and experience with it. Richards (1974:174) advocates intralingual errors are “those which reflect the general characteristics of rule learning, such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules and failure to learn conditions which rules apply.”

1.8.8 Development Errors

Richards (1974:174) posits that developmental errors occur when the learner attempts “to build up hypotheses about English language from his limited experience of it in the classroom or textbook.” These errors may occur as a result of the different strategies that learners use to learn the TL. Richards (1974:174) categorizes four types of developmental errors:

- i. Overgeneralization,
- ii. Ignorance of Rule Restrictions,
- iii. Incomplete Application of Rules and
- iv. False Concepts Hypothesized

1.8.8.1 Overgeneralization

Jalobovits (1969:55) defines generalization as “the use of previously available strategies in new situations”. He further explains that “in second language learning ... some of these strategies will prove helpful in organising the facts about the second language, but others, perhaps due to superficial similarities, will be misleading and inapplicable.”

Richards (1974:174) sees overgeneralization as “instances where the learner creates a deviant structure on the basis of his experience of other structures in the target language.”

He also posits “overgeneralization generally involves the creation of one deviant structure in place of two regular structures. It may be the result of the learner reducing his linguistics burden.”

Next, overgeneralization is linked with redundancy reduction. Overgeneralization may occur with items which are not contrasted in the grammar of the language as well as do not carry significant and obvious contrast for the learner (Richards, 1974:175). Richards (ibid) using the *-ed* marker, “*Yesterday I goed to the university and I meet my new professor.*”

Thirdly, over-generalized structures can be caused by certain teaching techniques such as using pattern drills and transform exercises. Such drills and exercises may lead to the production of hybrid structures which are made up of utterances that can interfere with each other. Another of Richards (ibid) example of such hybrid structure is:

Teacher	Instruction	Student
He walks quickly.	Change to continuous form	He is walks quickly.

1.8.8.2 Ignorance of Rule Restrictions

Here, Richards (1974:175) relates ignorance of rule restrictions as “the failure to observe the restrictions of existing structures, that is, the applications of rules contexts where they do not apply.” Analogy and rote learning of rules may be accounted for some rule restriction errors. The learner learns a particular preposition with one type of verb and later tries by analogy to use the same preposition with similar verbs. Richards (ibid) gives

examples of misuse of prepositions: “... *he said to me* gives *he asked to me*; *we talked about it*” leads to “*we discussed about it*”.

1.8.8.3 Incomplete Application of Rules

When L2 learners are more interested in communication than producing grammatically correct structures, they tend to produce structures with errors that reflect incomplete application of grammatical rules. Such incomplete application of rules reflects the learners’ development in learning the foreign language. Richards (1974:178) noted that “the occurrence of structures whose deviancy represents the degree of development of the rules required to produce acceptable utterances”. He gave a few examples:

Teacher’s Questions

1. *Do you read much?*
2. *Do you cook much?*
3. *Ask her what the last film she saw was called?*

Student’s Answers

- *Yes, I read much.*
- *Yes, I cook very much.*
- *What was called the last film you saw?*

When using English prepositions, learners need to know the different use of “**in**” and “**at**” though the same preposition in Malay is used as shown in sentences (1) and (2) respectively. In other cases, the same preposition in English –“**by**” can be represented by two different prepositions Malay. The researcher would like to highlight her own examples of incomplete application of rules for English preposition as shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Examples of Incomplete Application of Rules for English Preposition

English	Malay
1. His father works in Ipoh.	1. Bapanya bekerja di Ipoh.
2.* That performance is held in Istana Budaya. <i>Instead of</i>	2. Persembahan itu diadakan di Istana Budaya.

That performance is held at Istana Budaya.	
3. I usually go to work by car.	3. Saya pergi bekerja dengan kereta.
4. The thief must have entered and left by the back door.	4. Pencuri mesti masuk and keluar melalui pintu belakang.

1.8.8.4 False Concepts Hypothesized

Sometimes foreign language learners may form wrong concepts and use these concepts as their hypotheses when they form new sentences in the foreign language. As Richards (1974:174) suggests this type of developmental errors arises from “faulty comprehension of distinctions in the target language. These are sometimes due to poor gradation of teaching items.” The examples given by him on the use of prepositions are the confusion between *since* and *for*:

I have been here (for/ since) a week.

We have been in Canada (for/ since) 1968.

1.9 Prepositions

As defined in the Dictionary of Grammar, “A preposition is a word which joins a noun or pronoun to another word and indicates some relation between the noun or pronoun and that other word” (Smith, 1998:195). Similarly, Za’ba (1965:87) states that prepositions are “kata-kata khas dipakai dengan kata nama atau ganti nama sahaja bagi menunjukkan persangkutan nama atau ganti nama itu dengan sesuatu perkataan yang lain di dalam ayat” which can be translated as prepositions are special words used with only nouns or pronouns in order to show the relationship between the noun or pronoun and other word in the sentence).

Thatcher (2008:14) gives a more explicit definition:

“ A preposition is that part of speech which connects or relates one part of the sentence , usually a noun, a pronoun, a verb form ending in “-ing” or some equivalent complement (which the preposition is said to “govern”), to another part of the sentence or to the sentence as a whole.”

Thatcher also draws an analogy between prepositions and the mortar that holds the bricks (nouns, pronouns, noun phrases, gerunds) in a building (sentence or paragraph).

The following sentences are the researcher’s examples of how prepositions are used based on Thatcher’s definition:

Followed by a noun : Sit **on** the chair.

Followed by a pronoun : The cat sat **under** it.

Followed by a noun phrase : Why do you always do the opposite **of** what I tell you to do?

Followed by a verb form ending in “-ing” : The robbers succeeded **in** escaping.

Prepositions are words which express relationships of meaning related to time, place or other circumstances as shown below:

Space : He lived **in** an old house on the river bank.

Time : He stared at the woman **for** a while before he walked away.

Purpose : He ought to have a pet **for** company.

Possession : It went to sit on the other side **of** the room.

Result : The worker’s death **from** poisoning was informed to the authorities.

Some prepositions are used to indicate time such as **as, during, for, since,** and **until**. Other prepositions which are used to express spatial meanings are **above, below, in**

front of, between, across, and through. Example of prepositions used to express meanings related to causes such as reasons, purposes, motive, targets and objectives are: **because of, for, at, and on the account of.**

Allsop (1986:116, 120) categorizes prepositions into three types of prepositions namely, simple prepositions, compound prepositions and prepositions in **-ing**.

1.9.1 Simple Prepositions

Simple prepositions consist of one word such as **in, on, at, for** and many others.

1.9.2 Compound Prepositions

Examples of this type of prepositions are **inside, outside, between, beside, apart from that, because of, in addition to, with reference to** and many others.

1.9.3 Prepositions in -ing

These prepositions are mostly used in written English such as **according to, concerning** and **regarding**