

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the sampling, instrumentation, methodology and procedures used in analyzing the data.

3.1 SAMPLES

The samples of the study comprised 60 Form Three Malay students who are native speakers of Malay. They are both boys and girls between 14 and 15 years of age. All of them have studied English as a second language for more than 8 years.

The respondents selected are all Malay students as they form the majority of the ethnic group in this school, which is 83%. The sixty samples are from two classes in Form Three. The samples have been studying English for more than eight years at the time of the study. All the samples will be sitting for their PMR examination this year. Their English marks in their mid-year examination are in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1
Mid-term School Examination English Marks

Grades	No. of Students	%
A1	-	-
A2	4	6.6
C3	10	16.8
C4	12	20.0
C5	15	25.0
C6	12	20.0
P7	4	6.6
P8	3	5.0
F9	-	-
Total	60	100

Table 3.1 shows the grades the samples achieved in their English subject during the mid-term examination. Although most of the samples passed, 11.6% were in the below average category where they scored below 49%. Another 65% were in the average group with marks ranging from 50% to 70%, and 23.4% in the above average group with marks ranging from 71% to 80%.

3.2 RESEARCH TOOLS

Three methods were used for the elicitation of errors in this study, namely (1) essays, (2) questionnaires and (3) interview sessions.

3.2.1 Essays

The samples were required to write two essays of about 150 words each. Two topics were given namely, "My daily routine" and "What I did during the last holidays". The first topic "My daily routine" was set to test the ability of the students in the use of the present tense, while the second topic, "What I did during the holidays" was to test their ability to write about happenings in the past. The topics chosen elicited the use of the present and past tenses respectively. The subjects were encouraged to write freely and they were given 30 minutes to complete each essay. The essay writing task was administered by the researcher during the subjects' English lesson. The second essay was done the following day, also during the subjects' English lesson. Essay writing is a good instrument that looks into the language of students. Heaton (1988:127) claims that essay writing is a useful tool as '... it provides the students with an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to organize language material, using their own words and ideas, and to communicate'.

Before the task was administered, the students were told that it was not a test, and that they would not be graded. The aim of the writing task was to find out how well the students could express themselves in English by using the present and the past tenses. It was hoped that by not treating the task as a test, the subjects would be in a non-threatening environment to write the essays.

3.2.2 Questionnaire

Each student in the study was given the questionnaire during their English lesson. They were given 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire, which was devised by the researcher, was to find out about the samples' exposure to the English language, and their difficulty in the language.

3.2.3 Interview Sessions

Interview sessions were held with twelve students chosen at random. The interview sessions were held during the students 'library period', when students went to the library to read materials in English. Each student was interviewed for about 15 minutes. The researcher was careful in her selection of students as she chose those who were more expressive and vocal. The purpose of the interview sessions was to find out the students' perception of the reasons they committed the errors. This will give the researcher a better understanding of the causes of the errors from the students' own perception.

The researcher conducted the interview sessions by rewriting four erroneous sentences written by each of the subject. The subject was then asked to identify the errors in each of the sentence, and to explain the reasons for making the errors. The subject was also asked to explain why the particular tense was difficult and the problems the subject faced when using the tense.

The five English language teachers teaching English to Form Three students were also interviewed on how tenses are taught to their students and what strategies can be used to improve their understanding of tenses.

3.3 THE PILOT STUDY

A pilot study was done to gauge whether the compositions and questionnaires were of the subjects' level of understanding. Five students who were not participating in the actual study were randomly selected to do the compositions during their English lesson. The researcher instructed the students to write each essay in about 150 words. They were able to write the essays within the stipulated time of 60 minutes. Five different students who were also not participating in the actual study were randomly selected to do the questionnaire during their English lesson. The students were able to answer the questionnaire, and hence the questions were not modified.

3.4 THE MALAY VERBAL SYSTEM

The Malay verbal system is characterized by the use of prefixes or suffixes and modal auxiliaries. It does not have specific verbal inflexions like that of English to convey the idea of time involving the past, the present and the future. The idea of time is however expressed in other ways rather than through verbal inflections. Malay affixes have semantic and structural functions but these are not tenses. To indicate time, auxiliary words, adverbs of time or temporal expressions are used. Auxiliary words are used to denote temporal state or process, and adverbs of time are used to place the action in time. In Malay, there are two types of auxiliary words : aspectuals (*akan, sedang, sudah, belum, masih, pernah* and *telah*) and modals (*hendak, mahu, mesti, boleh, harus* and *dapat*) (Nik Safiah Karim, 1995:31). The auxiliaries relate the stages in the process of action, that is whether the action indicated by the main verb is action not yet done, action being done or action already done. The examples are as follows :

1. Action not yet done (*belum*)

Saya *belum* membaca suratkhobar.

I have not read the newspaper.

2. Action being done (*sedang*)

Saya *sedang* membaca suratkhobar.

I am reading the newspaper.

3. Action already done (*sudah*)

Saya *sudah* membaca suratkhobar.

I have read the newspaper.

Other examples that show that the notion of time does not exist in the Malay language are illustrated below where the verb *pergi* does not change even though there is a clear change in time from the present to the past. In the Malay language the verb does not conjugate, while in English it does.

1. Hari ini dia *pergi* ke sekolah bersama abangnya.

Today she *goes* to school with her brother.

2. Semalam dia *pergi* ke sekolah bersama abangnya.

Yesterday she *went* to school with her brother.

The examples above show that Malay verbs do not give any indication of the situation in time in relation to the time of speaking. Thus, time is not perceived in the same way in Malay as in English. In Malay, the time of an action indicated by aspect verbs is seen in the context of stages of action or time frames, and not in relation to the time one is speaking. In English, tenses relate the time of action to the time of speaking.

3.5 THE ENGLISH VERB FORMS

The Oxford Companion To The English Language (1992) states that 'a verb refers to a class of words that serve to indicate the occurrence of an action, or the existence of a state or condition' (p.1083). The two main types of verbs are full verbs and auxiliary verbs. According to Quirk and Greenbaum (1973), full verbs are lexical verbs and are divided into regular and irregular verbs. Auxiliaries are divided into primary auxiliaries (be, have, do) and modal auxiliaries or modal verbs (may, can, will, must, shall, ought to, need).

3.5.1 Tense

According to Jackson (1982:74) tense is a grammatical category, which tells us how our concept of time corresponds to the verb form. Scovel (1971 :30) defines tense as "*the syntax of time as it is marked in the verb forms*". Universally, time is divided into three main divisions i.e. past, present and future. In English, these time divisions are marked in the verb forms. To illustrate the definition, let us look at the examples given in the following section to describe the simple present, the simple past, the present progressive and the past progressive tenses.

3.5.2 The Simple Present Tense

The simple present tense is used to express thoughts and feelings at the present moment.

The simple present tense in English has various uses. It is used to refer to generally timeless statements such as those referring to '*eternal truths*' and habitual actions. This can be seen in the following examples.

- a. Two and two *make* four. (eternal truths)
- b. The whale *is* the largest mammal. (eternal truths)
- c. Aida *loves* playing volleyball. (habit)
- d. Siti *goes* to Singapore every month. (habit)

Quirk et. al (1972:85) outlines some other typical uses of the simple present tense, namely in

- a. Commentaries : Mokhtar *passes* the ball to Zainal.
- b. Demonstration : I now *press* F5 to continue.
- c. Exclamation : Here *comes* the bride!
- d. Performative declaration : We *acknowledge* your letter.

The simple present tense is also used to refer to the future.

- a. When there is a temporal adverbial in the clause.

Example :

The plane *leaves* for Kuching at five o'clock.

- b. In conditional and temporal clauses introduced by if, unless, after, before, as , when, etc.

Example :

I'll inform you as soon as I *meet* her.

The simple present tense is also used to refer to the past when used together with the 'communicative verb' such as tell, learn, hear, write, etc. The purpose is to express the communicative. Example : Nor Asikin *tells* me that you have been busy.

3.5.3 The Simple Past Tense

As its name implies, the simple past tense normally refers to past time, and specifically excludes present time. Quirk et. al (Ibid:86) in their definition of the past tense explicitly mention that 'The basic meaning of the simple past tense is to denote definite past time i.e. what took place at a given period before the present moment.'

Jespersen (1975:269) stresses that as long as the past is meant, whether it is mentioned or not, the English language requires the speaker or writer to use the past tense. This happens in the following conditions.

1. Reported speech – A statement in the present tense is reported in the past provided that the verb of reporting is itself in the past tense.

Example :

Direct speech : "I love Malaysia" (Present)

Reported speech : "She said that she loved Malaysia". (Past)

This is often explained as the '*sequence of tenses*' in the English language.

2. Hypothetical or Unreal past – normally used with the '*if clause*' and other clauses introduced by '*supposing*' and some relative clauses.

Examples :

If he *knew*, he would tell.

Supposing I *asked* you, could you answer?

3. Attitudinal past - To express a tentative or polite attitude in questions and requests

although the present tense (which is considered less polite) can be used.

Examples :

I *wanted* to ask you about the incident.

Did you want to see me now?

4. To express wishes and statements made at the moment of speaking.

Examples : I wish you *came*.

It is time we *went*.

The verb in the past simple can be either regular or irregular. The past simple of regular verbs is formed by adding '-d' or '-ed'. The following are examples of regular verbs:

BASE FORM	PAST SIMPLE
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live	lived
tie	tied
play	played
join	joined

There are sometimes spelling changes when the ‘-ed’ marked is added to regular verbs as in the following examples :

BASE FORM	PAST SIMPLE
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study	studied
cry	cried
hop	hopped
stop	stopped

The irregular verbs vary considerably in their simple past forms. For example, some irregular verbs are different from their base verbs as in the following verbs.

BASE FORM	PAST SIMPLE
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tear	tear
bring	brought

On the other hand, some irregular verbs are the same as the base verb. The examples below illustrate this:

BASE FORM	PAST SIMPLE
cut	cut
put	put
shut	shut

There are only two forms of the irregular verbs among the many other forms that exist.

3.5.4 The Present Progressive Tense

The present progressive tense according to Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1983:65) is used to refer to the following action.

- a. Event/action in progress at the time of speaking.

Example :

He is attending a meeting now.

- b. Temporary activity of which the action will end and therefore lacks the permanence of the simple present tense.

Example :

Mary *is living* with her parents.

- c. Repetition or iteration in a series of similar ongoing actions:

Example :

Henry *is kicking* the soccer ball around the backyard.

- d. Future time when the event is planned and usually appears with the future time adverbial.

Example :

She *is coming* tomorrow.

- e. Emotional comment on present habit which usually co-occurs with *always* or *forever*.

Example :

He *is always acting up* at these affairs.

3.5.5 The Past Progressive Tense

The past progressive tense is used in expressing an activity that was in progress at a particular time in the past. The time of the activity may or may not be indicated. The past progressive is formed when the primary auxiliary 'be' is followed by a present participle form (be + V-ing). The examples below illustrate the use of the past progressive tense.

1. John was driving to town.
2. He was travelling on the highway.

The past progressive is also used to describe two continuous actions going on at the same time in the past. Following are the examples.

1. While I was cooking, she was sewing.
2. While father was reading the newspaper, brother was was watching television.

The past progressive tense also expresses an action which began earlier and probably continued after that. This can be seen in the following sentences.

1. When I arrived, Mary was feeding the baby.
2. She was cooking, when the telephone rang.

Jespersen (1975:274) states that the forms of the past progressive are as follows:

a. Statement (positive and negative)

Singular nouns/pronouns + was/was not + VERB + -ing

Example :

She *was listening* to the radio when he called her.

Plural nouns/pronouns + were/were not + VERB + -ing

Example :

They *were playing* when the telephone rang.

b. Question (positive and negative)

was/wasn't + singular noun/pronoun + verb + -ing

Example :

Was she sleeping when you reached home?

were/weren't + plural noun/pronoun + verb + -ing

Example :

Weren't they studying when the headmaster came in?

3.6 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The method of analysis consists of the following steps: collection of data, identification of errors, classification of errors, quantification of errors, description of errors and analysis of sources of errors. These steps are further explained as follows :

3.6.1 Collection of data

The sixty selected students wrote two compositions each for the purpose of the study. A total of 60 compositions were then collected for the identification of errors.

3.6.2 Identification of errors

The data collected from the sixty compositions were then marked specifically for errors in the simple present, past, present progressive and past progressive tense errors. The researcher herself marked all the compositions.

3.6.3 Classification of errors

The errors were then categorized into error types according to Corder's (1981) taxonomy of errors: omission errors, addition errors and selection errors. The errors are classified as follows : -

1. Omission Errors

Omission errors occur when the students omit a verb. The types of omission errors in the simple present, simple past, present and past progressive tenses are illustrated below.

Types of Omission Errors in the Simple Present Tense.

The following are the two types of omission errors in the simple present tense.

a. Omission of the copula BE

Example :

* My mother ^ helpful. (is)

b. Omission of the main verb

Example :

* I will ^ my breakfast to school. (take)

Types of Omission Errors in the Simple Past Tense.

The following are types of omission errors in the simple past tense.

- a. Omission of the copula BE

Example :

* My mother ^ so happy. (was)

- b. Omission of the main verb

Example :

* I ^ very late that night. (slept)

Types of Omission Errors in the Present Progressive Tense

Below are types of omission errors in the present progressive tense.

- a. Omission of the auxiliary BE

Example :

* I ^ eating as fast as I can. (am)

- b. Omission of the -ing form

Example :

* My sister is laugh happily. (laughing)

Types of Omission Errors in the Past Progressive Tense

The following are omission errors in the past progressive tense.

- a. Omission of the auxiliary BE

Example :

* My mother ^ baking a cake. (was)

- b. Omission of the – ing

Example :

* My sister *was buy* a new dress when she saw her friend.
(buying)

2. Addition Errors

Addition errors occur when the students add an unnecessary item before the verb. The types of addition errors are as follows:

Types of Addition Errors in the Simple Past Tense

The following are types of addition errors in the simple past tense.

- a. Addition of BE (was) before the simple past verb.

Example : * I *was* kicked the ball.

- b. Addition of BE (were) before the simple past verb.

Example : * We *were* went jungle trekking.

- c. Addition of BE (are) before the simple past verb.

Example : * My brothers *are* felt happy.

3. Selection errors

Selection errors occur when students select the incorrect verb form to be used in place of the correct form. Types of selection errors are illustrated below.

Types of selection errors in the simple present tense.

The following are two types of selection errors in the simple present tense.

- a. The use of the simple past instead of the simple present.

Example :

* I *brushed* my teeth every morning. (brush)

- b. The use of the incorrect verb forms

Example :

* I *goed* to my grandmother's house after school. (go)

Types of selection errors in the present progressive tense.

Below are types of selection errors in the present progressive tense.

- a. The use of the simple present instead of the present progressive

Example :

* I *write* a letter to my grandfather. (am writing)

Types of selection errors in the past progressive tense.

Below are types of selection errors in the past progressive tense.

- a. The use of the simple past tense for the past progressive tense.

Example :

When we *played*, the ball crashed into a car.

(were playing)

- b. The use of the simple present tense for past progressive tense.

Example :

* While my mother *cooks* dinner, the phone rang. (was cooking)

- c. The use of present progressive tense for past progressive tense.

Example :

* My sister and I *are* going to the shop when we saw an accident. (were)

3.6.4 Quantification of errors.

The errors in the three categories were counted and tabulated separately for the two essays. The figures obtained indicated the frequency of the errors and the percentage of incorrect usage.

3.6.5 Description of errors.

The types of errors in the simple present tense, simple past tense, present progressive tense and past progressive tense found in the corpus will be described in terms of deviations from Standard British English.

3.7 CONCLUSION

The purpose of the analysis of sources of errors is to examine the possible causes of errors found in the data. It is hoped that the knowledge of the possible

difficulties faced by Malay students in the use of the simple present, simple past, present progressive and past progressive tenses, and therefore look for ways to overcome these difficulties.