

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of four sections. The first chapter presents a summary of the study. The second section looks into the conclusions drawn from the findings. The third section consists of the implications drawn from the study. Recommendations for further research are made in the fourth section.

5.1 SUMMARY

In this study, 60 Form Three Malay students of Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Telok Gadong, a semi-rural school in Klang were selected to write two essays, one in the simple present tense and one in the simple past tense. The subjects also completed a questionnaire. Interviews were also conducted with 12 students and 5 teachers to find out their perception of the causes of errors.

The types of simple past tense, simple present tense, present progressive tense and past progressive tense errors found in the 120 essays were identified in this study. The errors were then categorised into three sections, i.e. selection errors, addition errors and omission errors. This is according to Corder's (1981) taxonomy of errors. An analysis of the sources of errors to explain the possible causes of errors was also done.

5.2 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the questionnaire revealed that the subjects were not exposed to English outside the school environment. As their mother tongue is Malay, they conversed in Malay with their family and friends. This influenced their ability to speak in the target language. In the classroom, English was only spoken during their English lesson. The students spoke English with their English teacher and with their classmates. When speaking with their classmates, code switching, that is from English to Malay, was common. The questionnaires also revealed that all the subjects felt that speaking in English with their Malay friends alienated them from their friends.

From the interview sessions, the researcher found that errors were made in the students' essays because of interference from the subjects' mother tongue and the incomplete application of target language rules. All the subjects found the simple past tenses more difficult to deal with than the simple present tense because of the inexistence of tense in their mother tongue.

The subjects made the most number of errors in the simple past tense, making a total of 1674 errors or 62.8%, followed by the simple present tense with 302 errors or 51.1%, the past progressive tense with 48.6% or 95 errors, and the present progressive tense with 35 errors or 43.3%. The correct usage of the simple past tense was 991 or 37.2%. The simple present tense was correctly used 289 times or 48.9%. The correct usage of the past progressive tense was 101 or 51.5%, while the present progressive tense was correctly used 46 times or 56.7%.

The errors were then tabulated and then categorized into selection errors, omission errors and addition errors. Table 5.1 shows the distribution of errors into the three categories.

Table 5.1
Percentage Distribution of Error Categories

| Error Types | Simple Past Tense (%) | Simple Present Tense (%) |
|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Selection | 56.6 | 38.4 |
| 2. Addition | 32.6 | 0 |
| 3. Omission | 10.8 | 61.6 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Table 5.1 shows that the highest percentage of the simple past tense errors is found in the selection category, which constituted 56.6% of the total number of errors, followed by 32.6% in the addition category and 10.8% in the omission category. For the simple present tense, the highest occurrence of errors was in the omission category, which constituted 61.6% of the total number of errors, followed by the selection category constituting 38.4% of the total number of errors. There were no errors in the addition category.

The simple present tense had the most number of errors in the omission category. The errors were in the omission of the auxiliary BE. This could be due to lack of knowledge of the function of the auxiliary BE and improper learning.

For the present progressive tense, the highest percentage of errors was in the selection category with 74.2% of the total number of errors, while the omission category had 25.8% of errors. The highest percentage of errors in the past progressive tense was also in the selection category with 69% of the total number of errors while omission errors constituted 31% of the total number of errors. The highest percentage of errors is in the selection category and this indicates that students had difficulties in picking the correct tense in their sentences.

5.3 CONCLUSION

Several conclusions are made from the questionnaires, interview sessions and analysis of data in the essays. The findings revealed that the simple past tense had the highest frequency of errors, followed by the simple present tense, past progressive tense and present progressive tense. This could be probably due to the fact the past tense is graphically different from the present tense. The use of 'ed' markers and the irregular form of verbs is unfamiliar to the students and therefore they are unable to write grammatically correct sentences.

This study has also revealed that errors occur because students are still in the process of developing their second language. Overgeneralization, incomplete application of rules, ignorance of rule restriction result in errors as does interference of their mother tongue.

In the simple past tense, present progressive tense and past progressive tense, the highest frequency of errors was in the selection category. The high frequency of errors in this category reveals that students had selected the incorrect verb forms probably due to inadequate learning, and also because they were concentrating more on the contents of the essay than their grammar.

There were 116 errors in the selection category in the simple present tense. This could be due to the fact that the students had difficulty in selecting the correct verb to indicate the present time frame.

The highest frequency of selection errors of the simple past tense was in the use of the simple present tense for the simple past tense. This could be due to redundancy reduction. The highest occurrence of selection errors of the simple present tense was in the use of the simple past tense for the simple present tense, while in the present progressive the highest frequency of selection errors was in the use of the simple present for present progressive. In the past progressive tense, the highest frequency of selection errors was in the use of the simple past for the of the past progressive. Errors revealed the subjects' ignorance and lack of knowledge regarding the form and use of the correct tense. The subjects probably do not understand the concept of time; that is, the present tense expresses an action to indicate present time as well as habitual actions, and the past is used to express an action that had already happened.

In the simple present tense, the highest frequency of errors was in the omission category. This could be attributed to mother tongue interference. All the errors were in the omission of the auxiliary BE. The subjects had directly transferred knowledge from their native language to the target language.

This study revealed that errors made by the subjects could be due to interlingual and intralingual factors. Examples of interlingual errors found in the data are given below.

- a. The omission of the auxiliary BE because the subjects probably used the grammatical pattern of Malay to write in English. Since the auxiliary BE is not present in their mother tongue, it was omitted by the subjects.
- b. Time in the learners' mother tongue is indicated through words like 'sedang', and 'telah' followed by the verb. However in English, the present and past tense is indicated by changes in the verb form.

Other than errors due to mother tongue interference, some of the errors could be because of intralingual factors such as the subjects attempting to build hypotheses about the target language. Overgeneralization and the incomplete application of rules also are the reasons errors were committed by the students. Some of the interlingual errors found in the data are illustrated below.

- a. Use of the simple present tense for simple past tense, simple past for past progressive and vice versa as a result of incomplete application of rules.
- b. Addition of BE before the simple past verb as a result of overgeneralization and incomplete application of rules.

- c. Use of to-infinitive for simple past tense due to overgeneralization.
- d. Use of –ing form for simple past tense due to ignorance of rule restriction.
- e. Use of incorrect verb forms in the past tense, present tense, present progressive and past progressive due to overgeneralization and ignorance of rule restriction.
- f. Use of present tense for past tense and present progressive for past progressive due to false concepts hypothesized.
- g. Use of simple past for past progressive due to the lack of knowledge of the rules for the past progressive tense.
- h. Incorrect spelling due to overgeneralization.

Carelessness and tiredness could also be other sources of errors. Another possible cause is that the students are still in the process of acquiring the rules and structures of the English grammar. The subjects are still in the 'trial and error' period.

5.4 IMPLICATIONS

The findings from this study present a realistic picture of the problems faced by Malay students whose L1 is Malay and English is the learners' L2. The following are some implications for the effective learning and teaching of tenses.

1. Encourage students to discover the simple past, simple present tense, present progressive and past progressive through reading short texts in these tenses. Short texts in reading will improve the students writing ability as they will be able to recognize the correct tense to be used.
2. Provide simple explanations to the uses of the simple past tense, simple present tense, present progressive tense and past progressive tense by using short texts instead of single sentences so that students know how the tenses function in discourse.
3. Provide more practice on the simple past, present, present progressive and past progressive tenses so that a better understanding of these forms can be acquired.

4. Provide enough practice in sound discrimination as well as listening comprehension because these are helpful tools in learning to write.
5. Design exercises that expose students to the irregular verb forms that appear in the simple past tense.
6. Conduct spelling exercises where students learn to spell verbs used in the present, past, present progressive and past progressive tenses.
7. Provide simple topics for writing for weaker students and more challenging and advanced work for better students. In this way, both the weaker and better students will benefit because it caters to their immediate needs.
8. Group the students on the basis of language attainment as it makes it possible for the formulation of different sets of objectives for each group. In effect, it relieves the weaker students of having to strain towards unattainable objectives.
9. Teach tenses in the context of the expanded sentence or paragraph. A certain amount of drill is essential to emphasize what has been taught and for better comprehension of the grammatical system.

10. Use the technique of guided composition as it motivates students to write extensively, directed by clear objectives and attainable goals.
11. Device materials which are interesting and well-selected, and these materials should be consistent with the level of the students.
12. Create an awareness in students about the differences between the verb structures in Malay and English.
13. Select topics that are varied, challenging and interesting enough so that the students look forward to the learning of English.
14. Provide meaningful learning of English from instructors outside the school environment. Workshops on the use of tenses may be conducted whereby teachers from different schools conduct short-term courses designed for specific needs.

15. Identify errors that frequently occur in the students' work and allow them to search out and correct their errors.

16. Introduce self-correction and peer-correction so that students can learn from their own mistakes. This helps in building confidence.

17. Students should be encouraged to treat errors as a natural occurrence in language learning. In the learning of language, errors are an integral part. They are inevitable in the process of acquiring competence in the language. Errors should be viewed as building blocks for the mastery of language.

5.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Several suggestions are made for further research :

1. A study of other types of verb errors such as the future tense and perfect tense could be carried out.
2. A study of errors in the present tense, past tense, present progressive tense and past progressive tense made by students from other ethnic groups.
3. A different method of data collection such as the use of structured tests to examine errors made by average-proficiency Malay students.
4. A comparison of errors made by students in the urban and rural areas.