CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Language is peculiar to human beings. Language is what distinguishes human beings from other living things in this world. The need to communicate in human brings about changes and developments of human languages in this world. In this twenty-first century, in the era of globalisation, communication among humans has no boundaries. The borderless world allows human to communicate across the region from any point on earth and the advanced communication technologies enable the creations of sophisticated instruments which have made this kind of communication possible.

A common language communicated and understood by people all over the world is definitely essential in communication in the borderless world. Being an international language, the English language has perfectly served this purpose. Therefore, seeing the importance of this, several measures have been taken by the government of Malaysia in line with the development in communication technologies.

1.1   Background of the Study

The English language in Malaysia is becoming increasingly important. Once perceived as a colonial language, the English language in Malaysia has come a long

way. The government of Malaysia has taken proactive measures to help increase the level of English language proficiency among students in this country. One of the measures is to make English as a compulsory pass subject in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination in schools. This rule has increased the awareness among the Malaysian students that serious attention has to be paid to English and that this subject is very important to at least allow them to pursue to a higher level of education. Recently, English has been introduced as a medium of instruction in teaching the content subjects which are Mathematics and Science in schools. This is to further enhance the use of the English language among students in schools thus help to increase the level of proficiency in this language.

Realizing the importance of English, teachers and scholars of English are being actively more innovative and creative to make the teaching and learning of English more interesting and effective. Hence, abundant of teaching materials from various sources have been developed towards achieving the objectives of language teaching and learning. They can be found in the form of visuals and audio. Among the teaching materials which are commonly used are newspaper articles, pictures, songs, games, graphics, music and many more. Nowadays, there are a lot of teaching materials sprouting in the market and with the advanced of information technology these materials are also available on the internet. All these provide wide varieties of choices for teachers and learners of English.

1.2   Visuals and Language Learning

The use of visual aids in the world of language learning and teaching is not something strange. They have been used to facilitate language learning and teaching for many years. The role of visual aids is significant for effective teaching and learning, other than making learning more enjoyable and interesting. Brown (2000) posits that visual and auditory inputs are very important in a formal classroom. Brown defined visual learners as learners who are prone to studying charts, drawing and other graphic information, whereas auditory learners are those who prefer listening to lectures and audiotapes. Brown (2000) further elaborated that the use of both visuals and auditory inputs helps in making learning successful and therefore slight preferences of input choices by the students enable teachers to distinguish the type of students they have. According to Brown, this is an important factor in classroom instructions in ensuring effective teaching and successful learning.

Visual by definition is something that is concerned with seeing, something that can be seen through the eyes. In the area of language learning, visual is something that the students can see which is utilized to aid the learning of a language. This usually happens during the early childhood period, where children are taught to read using books which contain images in vibrant colours. For instance, when teaching children about an apple, the teacher will pronounce the word and simultaneously show the picture of an apple in bright red colour, which

then presents the visual input to the children on how the apple looks like. This visual creates a mental picture which tells the children that an apple is red in colour and round in shape. Learning is successful when the children are able to distinguish an apple from any other fruits in a real situation plus the ability to pronounce the word 'apple'. As their language develops, these children will be able to use the word 'apple' in contexts, such as to express their preference of fruit -- "I like apple". If the children were only taught how to pronounce the word 'apple', they may not have the idea of its visual form or even may not be able to figure out whether the word 'apple' is an object or an abstract. Thus, these children might not know how to use the word 'apple' in different contexts. Hence, based on the simple example given, it is clear that visuals do play an important role in language learning, to further enhance language learning and understanding which also help to attach meaning.

In discussing about teaching aids, Lee and Coppen (1975) agreed that aural and visual aids are helpful to teachers of a foreign language. They were of the opinion that both aural and visual aids help to make teaching and learning interesting by providing different variety and interest into the language classroom. Lee and Coppen stated that, *"both aural and visual aids can stimulate children to speak the language as well as to read and write it"* (1975:1). They added that the visual aids also help to provide the situations (contexts) which light up the meaning of the utterances used.

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Canning (2001) believed that visual aids are important. According to Canning, humans have the ability to form a 'mental' picture of what we may have seen. This mental image may at times make a greater impact than auditory input. Based on this, Canning believed that visual cues are important since they could facilitate learning. In relation to language skills, Gibson and Levin (1975) as quoted by Canning (2001), said that, *"Letters are symbols. They stand for a sound and when put together with other 'letters/symbols', they form meaning through recognizable words. Words become visual symbols and clues, which can aid in the written communication"* (2001:3).

Wright (1989) believed that pictures as a form of teaching resources provide a rich base and stimulus for students to develop their ability to use foreign language because pictures have the characteristics to help students develop a conversation or discussion. Hence, using more of the language helps the students to be more competent in the language they are learning. Wright also specified that pictures contribute to *"interest and motivation, a sense of the context of the language, and a specific reference point or stimulus"* (1989:2).

1.3   Statement Of the Problem

The level of English language proficiency among Malaysian students has long been an issue. The falling standard of English among the graduates of the local universities has raised worries among the societies. These graduates are not

competent enough to communicate effectively in English, hence leaving them unemployed although many of them posses excellent results in their majoring courses.

As the respondents in this study are concerned, they are students of the Art and Design faculty in Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) in Shah Alam, who are also going to be graduates soon. Unfortunately, the majority of these students do not possess a good English result in their SPM examination. Many of them have a mere pass or a low credit in English as entry points to Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM). Some of them are not able to function in English at all.

My experiences as an English lecturer for a few years in this faculty have allowed me to observe the attitude of these students towards English. Many of these students do not see English as an important course. This is because they have the perception that dealing with art pieces and other creative creations does not require much use of language. They believe that they are only dealing with their own self – their emotions, thinking and perceptions. Furthermore, English is considered as something non-abstract. English is viewed by these students as a course that does not require much exploration of the mind or challenge their creativity like art, but deals more with memorization and familiarity of the language. These students believe that their talent and credibility in art are the utmost important in ensuring success in their studies. English is perceived as something they can make do without and a mere pass is sufficient to them. These have resulted in poor participation and

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lack of motivation on the part of the students in the language learning process which further lead to depression on the teaching itself.

Therefore, in this study, visual aids in the form of creative work of art which is cartoon will be used to facilitate the teaching and learning of English to a group of Art and Design students and to further investigate the role of this form of visual aid in the learning of language among these students. The underlying idea is to integrate art as a form of visual aid to teach English to Art and Design students.

In order to determine the types of learners the teachers are teaching, some efforts have to be taken. Different varieties of teaching materials are required in order to get the answer to this question. Unfortunately, language teachers are often burdened with heavy teaching loads and administrative works. Thus, at times, they tend to forget the priorities of their job therefore determining the types of learners they have are often neglected. Referring to the Art and Design students, they deal with a lot of visuals in their study. Therefore, it is important for teachers to select suitable teaching materials in order for the teaching of English to these students to be effective and also to enhance the learning of this language among them.

Many teachers often take for granted the type of learners they are teaching. Since they are normally provided with textbooks, teachers would teach based on the syllabi and use the textbooks throughout their teaching. Mission is considered accomplished when they have covered all the topics required as listed in the

syllabus. This phenomenon is not unusual even with the development of teaching materials and methodologies. The learners are at stake if this phenomenon is to continue. The learners' competencies in the language they are learning will be hindered. Language learning will be perceived as boring and worthless and this could lead to depression and frustrations in the learning and teaching of language.

1.4   Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to determine whether cartoons as a form of visual image could promote language learning and also to investigate its implications in the learning and teaching of English. This study also attempts to find out whether the use of cartoons affects the students' language skills in terms of the use of adjectives and their overall performance in writing. The students' and teachers' perception on the use of cartoons in the learning and teaching of English will also be looked into in this study to further see the role of cartoons in language learning.

1.5   Rationale of the Study

The rationale of this study is that the use of visuals especially cartoons could enhance language learning. The learners' competency in the language could be further improved when learning using cartoons because cartoons as a form of visuals could stimulate responses from the learners, hence, encouraging learners to

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use more of the language. The humour, which is very much needed in today's classroom, is presented in cartoons. This will certainly help to enlighten the classroom environment making learning more enjoyable and interesting. This kind of classroom atmosphere helps to instil language learning among the language learners. Therefore, cartoons could act as a source of motivation in the learners to learn the language. Cartoons could also arouse the learners' interest into using more of the language which then helps to improve the learners' ability in the language. Cartoons can help learners to improve their receptive and productive skills in the language through the various characteristics in cartoons. Therefore the use of cartoons as a visual aid in enhancing the learning and teaching of English is significant.

1.6   Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions :-

a)   How does the use of cartoons help to promote language learning?

b)   How do cartoons affect the learning of English in relation to :

    i)   the use of adjectives in writing?

    ii)   the overall performance of students' writing?

c)   What are the effects of using cartoons in language learning?

d)   What are the effects of using cartoons in the students' writing?

e)   What are the students' perceptions on the use of cartoons in learning English?

f)   What are the lecturers' perceptions on the use of cartoons in English language learning?

1.7   Significance of the Study

Many studies have been done on visual aids such as pictures, graphics and films such as those done by Wright (1976,1989), Hill (1990), Handono (1996) and Chiasson (2002). On the contrary, the research on the use of cartoons in language learning, in my opinion is still scant. Many cartoons that have been created and published in a lot of newspapers are not appropriate to be used as teaching materials due to the inappropriacy of the language used, topics that they deal with or even the features of the cartoons themselves are not suitable to be used in

teaching. Furthermore, cartoons are often regarded as educationally unsound which makes them an inappropriate choice of visual aids to be used in classroom instructions. A careful selection is vital and important before cartoons are decided to be used in the classroom. Therefore, this study hopes to provide some insights and added knowledge to the study of creative art or cartoons or visuals in general in language learning and teaching.

1.8   Limitations of the Study

1.8.1   Limitation of the Sample

The sample of this study is confined to only 28 students from the Art and Design Faculty of Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) in Shah Alam and 4 lecturers who are teaching English in that faculty. This small number of respondents is only a small population in comparison to the whole population of English as a Second Language (ESL) in Malaysia at large. Hence, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to other ESL learners and lecturers in Malaysia. Information gained from the lecturers cannot be generalized as the opinion of all English lecturers teaching Art and Design students or other students of various disciplines in Malaysia due to the very small number of lecturers selected for this study.

1.8.2   Limitation of the Duration of the Study

This study was carried out for only 3 weeks due to the time constraint of this research and the schedule of the students. Each week is limited to only a session of one hour. Such a short period of study will restrict the findings only to the amount of information that could be gathered during the limited period. Even that so, it is hoped that the principles of this study and its comparatively small findings could perhaps shed some light on the teaching and learning of English in Malaysia.

1.8.3   Limitation of the Material of the Study

The materials selected for this study are *'Lat'* cartoons found in the books of *'Lat'* cartoon collections namely the *'Kampung Boy - Yesterday and Today'* and *'Be Serious, Lat!'*. The *'Lat'* cartoons which are selected for this study are those carrying the local conflicts and themes rendered around the social aspects of the Malaysians. These cartoons are carefully selected to ensure their appropriateness and capability of eliciting responses from the students.

1.9   Definition of Terms

According to Melor (1999), by definition, a cartoon is usually a one-frame caricature which is used to present a particular idea. The idea may be either political or social in nature and usually has an element of humour attached to it.

The cartoon may also appear in the form of captioned or uncaptioned. On the other hand, Melor (1999) explained that a comic strip is a form of cartoon which has more than one frame and is usually run in a daily or weekly newspaper. The comic strip may have different topic each time and may also have a continuing story. Comic strips are usually captioned and deal with topics such as gender, political, moral and social issues.