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Usage and attitudes towards spoken English: A preliminary survey

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<tr>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Seminar Room</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEB</td>
<td>Faculty of Economy and Business</td>
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<tr>
<td>FIT</td>
<td>Faculty of Information Technology</td>
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<td>FK</td>
<td>Faculty of Engineering</td>
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<td>FSGK</td>
<td>Faculty of Creative Arts</td>
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<td>FPSK</td>
<td>Faculty of Medicine and Health Science</td>
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<td>Faculty of Cognitive Science and Human Development</td>
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<td>FSTS</td>
<td>Faculty of Science and Technology Resources</td>
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<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
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<td>UNIMAS</td>
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The purpose of this study is to find out the UNIMAS Malay undergraduates’ usage and attitudes towards spoken English; and the problems they encountered when using English in specific language situations that lead to infrequent use of spoken English. The respondents were one hundred Malay Undergraduates from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. The instrument used in this study is a questionnaire. Data were analyzed using percentage.

The results indicated that the Malay undergraduates who speak English at home use English more frequently in their daily communication. Majority of the Malay undergraduates have positive attitudes towards spoken English. However, low confidence in their own ability and a sense of unease, especially when engaging in spontaneous speech leads to the infrequent use of spoken English. Thus, Malay undergraduates need to gain intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, to encourage them to communicate frequently in spoken English.
ABSTRAK

Kajian in bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti penggunaan dan sikap pelajar-pelajar Melayu UNIMAS terhadap pertuturan dalam Bahasa Inggeris; dan mengenali masalah-masalah yang dihadapi untuk menggunakan Bahasa Inggeris pada situasi tertentu yang mendorong kepada tidak kerap bertutur didalam Bahasa Inggeris. Responden terdiri daripada 100 orang pelajar Melayu dari Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. Soal-selidik digunakan sebagai kaedah kajian. Data dianalisa menggunakan peratusan.

Hasil Kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar-pelajar Melayu yang menggunakan Bahasa Inggeris di rumah lebih kerap bertutur menggunakan Bahasa Inggeris didalam komunikasi harian. Majoriti pelajar Melayu mempunyai sikap yang positif terhadap Bahasa Inggeris. Walau bagaimana pun, kurang keyakinan pada kebolehan diri dan perasaan tidak selesa terutama apabila terlibat didalam perbualan secara spontan menyebabkan mereka tidak kerap bertutur didalam Bahasa Inggeris. Oleh itu, pelajar-pelajar Melayu memerlukan motivasi dalaman dan luaran untuk menggalakkan mereka bertutur didalam Bahasa Inggeris dengan lebih kerap.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Chapter one of this study, dealt with factors that contribute towards the importance of English as a second language. It also states the problems; the study objectives; the research questions; the hypothesis; the significance, the limitation of the study and definitions of some important key words.

1.1 Introduction

Education in Malaysia is based upon the National Education Philosophy that aims to bring about the holistic and integrated development of individuals in term of their intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical growth. The medium of instruction in the schools throughout Malaysia is Malay language. It is a compulsory subject in all schools, without exception. Whereby, English is taught in both primary and secondary schools in Malaysia and its position is as a second language.

The prominence of English in the society is acknowledged by the Ministry of Education as declared in the Malaysian School Syllabus;

"... is an important language to enable Malaysians to engage meaningfully in local and international trade and commerce. It also provides an additional means to access to academic, professional and recreational materials. The English Language Program thus aims to provide the basis for these post secondary school need."

(Sukatan Pelajaran Sekolah Menengah Bahasa Inggeris, 1988:2)
Some of the objectives in the Secondary school English Language Program is to enable students to listen to and understand spoken English in the school and in real life situations; speak effectively on a variety of topics (Sukatan Pelajaran Sekolah Menengah Bahasa Inggeris, 1988).

However, despite the implementation of the teaching of English as a second language for some years, according to Ahmad Mohd. Yusuf et al. (1992), in daily communication the Malay undergraduates are more convenient to use Malay language while their counterparts from other races prefer to use English. The Malay undergraduates also use less English when dealing with administration or discussing with lecturer outside lecture hall.

Malay Language is more widespread as a tool of communication among the Malay undergraduates. This phenomenon also occurs among Malay undergraduates at UNIMAS. Although before entering UNIMAS, all the student learned English as a second language and the medium of instruction during their primary and secondary schooling are not English, Malay undergraduates in UNIMAS do not use English as frequently as do their counterparts from other races. In view of the declining standard of proficiency among young learners, and the increasing demand for English as a language for communication described earlier, it is imperative that Malay Undergraduates strive towards making communicative competence their ultimate goal.
1.2 Statement of the Problems

Malaysian Education Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak told reporters that:

"The English language is vital for the survival of a nation, and it must be able to master the language or else it will be left behind," he said. "Bahasa Malaysia is also as important as English and Malays must have control of both languages".

(The New Straits Times, July 21, 1995)

As quoted above Datuk Najib has warned that Malays stand to lose if they shun the English language. He said that Malays must know at least two languages to excel in the world.

The importance of the English language is naturally very great. English is extremely important as a second language in Malaysia. It is the international language of the airlines, of computer technology, of science, and indeed of communication generally. Nowadays in many parts of the world professional success depends more and more upon a fluency in English.

By knowing the usefulness of English, this study is therefore to explore the reasons behind UNIMAS Malay Undergraduates' infrequent use of spoken English. The causal factors that influence such occurrences are the Malay undergraduates' attitude towards the use of English, their family background and their problems in using English in specific language situation.
1.3 Study Objectives

This study will be carried out to meet the following objectives:

a) To identify whether family background influence the use of English in the Malay undergraduates daily communication.

b) To find out Malay undergraduates' attitudes towards spoken English.

c) To find out Malay undergraduates' problems to use English in specific language situations.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated in order to meet the purpose of this study:

a) How does the family background influence the use of English language in Malay undergraduates daily communications?

b) What are the Malay undergraduates' attitudes towards spoken English?

c) What is the Malay undergraduates' problems in using English in specific language situations?
1.5 Hypothesis

This study will be carried out to support the following hypothesis:

a) Learners who use English with their family members are those who use English frequently outside their home.

b) Learners with negative attitude towards English are those who use less English in their daily communication.

c) Learners who have problems using English language in specific language situation use less spoken English.

1.6 Significance of the study

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) was officially launched on 31 August 1993 by our Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Muhamad. Building a university takes time and planning. Building a university with a view to what will be needed in the next century both in terms of new technology and human resources, takes more time and more planning. The task of building a new university is never easy and to translate the University's mission into reality is a big challenge for UNIMAS to face. Therefore UNIMAS mission is:

"The University's mission is to establish itself as an exemplary university of internationally acknowledged stature, and as a scholarly institution of preference and choice for both students and academic staff through the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research and scholarship. It will do so by offering a range of opportunities in education, training and scholarly services, and through the strategic and innovative application of knowledge to enhance the quality of the nation's culture and the prosperity of its people".

(Annual Report, 1994: 1)
In fulfilling its mission the University is committed to pursue and advance relevant and useful knowledge; to encourage its application to the nation's intellectual, social, economic, technological and industrial development; and to conserve, refine and transmit knowledge through scholarship, publication and the development of information systems to meet the needs of society. Furthermore, to establish close linkages with government, the local community and industry and with other academic institutions, both national and international (Annual Report, 1994).

With its unique mission UNIMAS is leading the way of having more English compare to other universities in Malaysia. It is not surprising to know that UNIMAS is prominent in using English for lecture. In order to effectively achieve the preceding aims, spoken English cannot be avoidable. Seem Malay undergraduates are half of UNIMAS population it is important to do a preliminary survey on their attitudes towards English. Therefore, this study is to find out UNIMAS Malay undergraduates' attitudes and usage towards spoken English; and the problems they encountered to use English in specific language situations that lead to infrequent use of spoken English. Hence, this will enable UNIMAS to understand its students-clients attitudes towards English and design programs that is conducive to academic pursuits. This will make a vital difference between UNIMAS and other universities.
1.7 Limitation of the Study

The following are the limitations of this study:

a) Only 100 respondents participated in this study because there are few Malay undergraduates in UNIMAS campus.

b) This study was only conducted within the UNIMAS Malay undergraduates’ staying in the hostel, not on the undergraduates staying outside the campus. Due to the transportation problems they were reluctant to participate.

1.8 Definition of Terms

The definition of important terms used in this study are given below:

Malay undergraduates

They are UNIMAS students working for a bachelor’s degree who speaks the Malay language as their mother tongue, lead the Malay way of life and profess the Islamic faith.

Usage

Hornby et al. (1984), defines usage as a body of conventions governing the use of a language especially those aspects not governed by grammatical rules. In this study usage refer to the use of English language by the Malay undergraduates in their daily communication.
Code-switching

According to Odlin (1991), code-switching is a systematic interchange of words, phrases, or sentences taken from two or more languages. In this study ‘more languages’ refer to Malay and English languages.

Attitude

Hornby et al. (1994), defines attitude as a way of feeling, thinking or behaving. In this study, attitude is defined as the UNIMAS Malay undergraduates’ way of feeling, thinking or behaving towards spoken English and it are classified into three categories as below:

1. The Malay undergraduates’ attitudes towards English lessons during primary and secondary schooling.

2. The Malay undergraduates’ attitudes towards preferred materials in English for self-purposes.

3. The Malay undergraduates’ attitudes towards speaking English.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In this chapter, a general review of the related literature is stated. It revolves around Malaysia education system. The discussions also explore the status of English on the historical perspectives and at the present days. In addition, it provides review on several related research that is relevant to this study.

2.1 Introduction

In UNIMAS, the Malay undergraduates can be divided into a few major groups. They are students from The North Western: Kedah, Perlis, Penang; the North Eastern: Kelantan and Terengganu and the Southern students: Johore, Melaka, Pahang, Selangor, Perak, Negeri Sembilan; and students from Sabah and Sarawak. Bahasa Malaysia or Malay is widely use in communicating with one another.

"Language is used to do things such as to inform, to control, to persuade and to express one’s feelings. We do all these as we communicate with one another. Anyhow to use second language in daily communication is not an easy task for certain group of people as mentioned”.

(Platt and Webber, 1980: 167)
In Malaysian schools, English is taught in both primary and secondary schools. In line with the education policy, English is to be taught as an effective second language. The syllabus gives attention to communicative language teaching.

The levels in the present education system are a six-year Primary education, three-year Lower Secondary education, two-year Upper Secondary education and a two-year Form VI education. The Form VI level is followed by the Higher Education level that consists of education in colleges and universities.

The medium of instruction in National Schools throughout Malaysia is Bahasa Malaysia. Mostly, the students are of Malay ethnicity. However, the medium of instruction in the National Type Primary School (Chinese) is the Chinese Language while the Tamil Language is the medium of instruction in the National Type Primary School (Tamil).

Besides having the same levels in education, two main groups emerge in UNIMAS:

(i) those who use spoken English frequently

(ii) those who only use spoken English in certain situations.

Both groups of students in this study acquired English as a second language and the medium of instruction during their primary and secondary schooling years are not English.
medium schools in the region enrollment of 28,071 by 1931. Attendance at these schools was unevenly distributed, both regionally and ethnically. Possibly 2 percent of school-age children would have been at an English-medium school. Among the Malays virtually only the sons of the royal and aristocracy had the opportunity to attend them. However, the Malay elite had no such problems. They sent their children to English medium schools. Thus, while the ordinary Malays were denied access to the bilingual education that could lead to economic and social advancement, special provision was made to ensure the elite had that access. By 1970 only 14.8% of the Malay population lived in urban areas (Chandler, 1972). Their literacy rate in English was estimated at only 10.8%, much lower than that of the Chinese and Indian communities.

English has now become the second most important language in Malaysia. This was even stressed when the government introduced the Third Malaysian Plan (1974). The government will encourage vigorously the teaching of Bahasa Malaysia and ensure that English is taught as a strong second language. It is important if Malaysia is to keep abreast of scientific and technological developments in the world and participate meaningfully in international trade.

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2.3 The Present Day

According to many reports, English is facing the problem of deterioration, at least in its roles and status as a second language in Malaysia. Even though it remains as a compulsory second language in the school system and retains an important place in the school system as well as in tertiary education, performance by means of major government examinations, showed that there is a negative development of English language from year to year.

The status and role of English went into reverse gear in 1970. With the deliberate elevation of Bahasa Malaysia for political reasons, English lost its prestige of old and its roots, never really deep even in its heyday, began to shrink at an alarming rate. The reality of the present-day Malaysian situation indicates that English in social and professional interaction has decreased very much in volume and is progressing towards its non-existence quite rapidly (Asmah Haji Omar 1982).

According to Datuk Musa Hitam (cited in Platt and Weber, 1980), the English language was an important second language in schools and institutes of higher learning. The standards were maintained and even improved and serious attention was be given by the ministry, teachers and parents. However, what is actually happening now is not what Datuk Musa Hitam expected when he was the Minister of Education in 1978.
Besides learning and using English in the classroom, parents and siblings will give
great contributions to the learners if they have positive attitudes towards spoken English
and use it at home. It will help the learners to use spoken English outside the classroom.
The declination of English as stated by the Deputy Director of Education:

"The standard of English among rural students is poor largely because of their reluctances to use it after school hours. English taught in schools 'existed in a vacuum and was not supported by the other subjects. Parents are also unhappy and reluctant to encourage their children to pay more attention to the subject because it is a colonial language'.

(New Sunday Times, January 4, 1987)

At the same time, if family environment does not encourage them to practice the
language, they will not be able to use it in other domains.

The undergraduates' attitudes towards achieving their goals in learning the second
language will develop confidence for them to use the language. In another study by
Gardner and Lambert it was found that there were strong relationships between parents'
and children's attitudes. They suggested that: "Attitudes are develop in home before
language training starts". Attitudes influence the use of spoken English in a number of
ways. Attitudes have a great effect on the undergraduates' performance in English
(Gibbons, 1983).

Malay is the language choice at the unofficial level in Malaysia within the Malay group
and among the non-English educated people of various groups. While English is used
among English-educated people at the intra and intergroup level. Generally, Malay
undergraduates do not use spoken English as frequently as do their counterparts. In
relation to this, the researcher believes that the causal for the above phenomenon are their
family backgrounds, their attitudes and their competence in the second language which influence their usage of spoken English (Asmah Haji Omar, 1987).

According to Ozog (1993), the standard of English proficiency has fallen. Proficiency in English is no longer a requirement for advancement in either school or tertiary education. In theory, a student could go from primary grade one to post graduate level and then throughout his/her professional life without passing an English exam or in fact knowing any English at all. Reality, however, is very different. English is essential for educational and career advancement in many fields. In theory, a student with no knowledge of English can study at a Malaysian university. A pass in English at any level is not an entry requirement and yet the student is expected to at least be able to read textbooks written in English and in some faculties, law for example, to demonstrate some proficiency in the spoken language.

2.4 Related Literature.

There have been several research studies done on the aspect of learners' usage and learners' attitudes towards spoken English. A research of such nature was carried out by Littlewood, Liu and Yu (1996). The target population of the survey was first-year undergraduates in Hong Kong's universities. The final analyzable sample was 2,156 representing 20% of the six universities' 94/95 first-year intake of 11,017. A questionnaire was used in the survey. They highlighted interesting findings. 89% of students do not feel that they will lose their Chinese identity if they are good at English.
They think of English more as an important world language (97%) than a colonial one (57%). A stronger influence on students’ effective attitudes towards speaking English seems to be their experience at school. When the combined effects of frequency and liking of Forms Six and Seven oral activities and perceived English improvement were examined, it was found that only the frequency of oral activities has a significant effect on students’ attitudes, the more often they did oral activities, the more positive their affective attitudes to English and vice versa. The interaction effects the three factors (frequency and liking of oral activities and perceived English improvements) were found to be insignificant. In other words, students may feel uncomfortable speaking English simply because they have not had much practice in it. They also found many students feel a sense of uneasiness speaking English simply because they do not think they are performing well enough.

In another study, Ahmad Mohd. Yusuf et al. (1992) carried out a research on the usage of Bahasa Malaysia at Universiti Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Pertanian Malaysia, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Universiti Utara Malaysia and Institut Teknologi Mara. 1185 undergraduates from different ethnic groups participated as respondents. The method used in this research was interview. The findings showed that the use of English during discussion among Malay undergraduates at Higher Education Level in Malaysia with friends from the same ethnic group was only 1.1%. Meanwhile only 6.6% of Malay undergraduates used English if they discussed with friends from different ethnic groups. Malay undergraduates also used less English when dealing with administration or discussing with lecturer outside lecture hall.