

SYNTACTIC TRANSFER AMONG FORM FOUR MALAY STUDENTS

AMALINA JOHARI

This project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a
Bachelor of Education with Honours
(TESL)

Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK
(2009)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I have indeed learned a lot of things in completing this Final Year Project and I would not have been able to complete this project all by my own. Therefore, I would like to thank the people who have helped me through the completion of this study.

First of all, I am very grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Shanthi Nadarajan, for her patience, comments, suggestions and advice concerning my research. Her critical thinking has helped me to develop my research.

I am also grateful to Pengetua SMK Matang Hilir, Hajah Dayang Mastura bt Awang Hashim and Penolong Kanan Pentadbiran, Puan Senah bt Jan for giving me the consent to conduct the study in the school. I am also thankful to all the English teacher of Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Matang Hilir, especially En. Mohd Subhi Abd. Latif for helping me to collect the data of the research. To the entire respected Form Four English teacher of SMK Matang Hilir, I express my sincere appreciation for your assistance in participation in this study.

Many thanks are due to my family members and friends for their supports and prayers. To those who had helped me directly and indirectly in this study, my sincere appreciation and thanks. Most importantly, I thank God for his mercy and blessings throughout my entire life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgement	iii
Table of Content	iv
List of Figures	vii
List of Table	viii
Abstract	ix
<i>Abstrak</i>	x

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.0	Overview	1
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Background of the Study	2
1.3	Statements of Problems	4
1.4	Aim and Objectives of the Study	5
1.5	Research Questions	6
1.6	Significance of the Study	6
1.7	Operational Definition of Terms	7
1.8	Scope of the Study	9
1.9	Chapter Review	9

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0	Preview	10
2.1	Language Transfer	10
2.2	Syntactic Transfer and Related Studies	13
	2.2.1 What is Syntactic Transfer	13
	2.2.2 Types of Syntactic Errors	13
	2.2.3 Related Studies	14
2.3	Second Language Acquisition Theory	16
	2.3.1 The role of Mother Tongue in Second Language Acquisition	16
2.4	Contrastive Analysis	17
2.5	Error Analysis	18
2.6	Chapter Review	19

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0	Preview	20
3.1	Research Design	20
3.2	Participants	21
3.3	Instrument for Data Collections	22
3.4	Data Collection Procedures	23
3.5	Data Analysis	24
3.6	Limitations of the Study	25
3.7	Chapter Review	25

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0	Chapter Overview	26
4.1	Findings	26
4.2	The Main Language Errors Produced by Malay Students in English Summary Writing	27
4.3	The Common Syntactic Errors Produced by Malay Students in English Summary Writing?	31
4.4	Does the Level of Proficiency Affects the Use of Syntactic Transfer in Malay student's English Summary Writing?	35
4.5	Why do/does the Syntactic Transfer Occurs in English Summary Writing among Malay Students?	38
	4.5.1 Overgeneralization	38
	4.5.2 Mother-tongue Influence	39
	4.5.3 Low Proficiency	41
4.6	Discussion	42
4.7	Summary	48

CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

5.0	Chapter Overview	50
5.1	Summary of the Study	50
5.2	Implications	52
5.3	Recommendations for Future Research	53
5.4	Conclusion	54

REFERENCES	55
-------------------	-----------

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A	READING TEXT OF SUMMARY WRITING	57
APPENDIX B	READING TEXT OF SUMMARY WRITING	60
APPENDIX C	READING TEXT OF SUMMARY WRITING	62
APPENDIX D	KPM LETTER OF APPROVAL	63
APPENDIX E	JPN LETTER OF APPROVAL	65
APPENDIX F	UNIMAS LETTER OF APPROVAL	67
APPENDIX G	SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION	68

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.2.1 Language errors produced by Form 4 Malay students in their English summary writing.	28
Figure 4.2.2 The main language errors produce by Malay students in their English summary writing.	29
Figure 4.3.1 The syntactic errors produced by Malay students in their English summary writing.	31
Figure 4.3.2 The common syntactic errors produced by Malay students in their English summary writing.	32
Figure 4.4.1 The comparison of main syntactic errors among low, intermediate and advanced students.	35
Figure 4.4.2 The comparison of lifting sentences produced by low, intermediate and advanced students.	47

LIST OF TABLE

Table 1

Lifting analysis (the description and examples of lifting sentences)

45-46

ABSTRACT

SYNTACTIC TRANSFER AMONG FORM FOUR MALAY STUDENTS

Amalina Johari

This study aimed to investigate the syntactic error and occurrence of syntactic transfer among Form Four Malay students. The objectives of this research are to determine the language errors and common syntactic errors made by Malay students in their summary writing. This study also compared and explained the occurrence of syntactic transfer produced by advanced, intermediate and low proficiency of Malay students in English summary writing. The respondents of the study are 60 Malay students with 20 students from each of level of proficiency from Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Matang Hilir. The data for this study were collected through the Error Analysis of students' English summary writing and interview sessions with the English teacher were conducted to support the study. This research found that the main language errors produced by Malay students are pronouns, verbs, tenses and spelling errors. In addition, the common syntactic errors produced by the students are pronouns, verbs inflection, copula be, determiner, preposition, plural marking and auxiliary verbs. The syntactic errors produced by the Malay students were affected by the mother tongue influence, overgeneralization and low proficiency of the English language. The comparison of syntactic error among low, intermediate and advanced students revealed that the low students produced less errors in certain types of syntactic error as the low students were mainly lifting the word or sentences in the comprehension provided while writing the summary.

ABSTRAK

SYNTACTIC TRANSFER AMONG FORM FOUR MALAY STUDENTS

Amalina Johari

Matlamat kajian ini adalah untuk menyelidik kesalahan sintaksis dan pemindahan sintaksis di kalangan pelajar Tingkatan Empat. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji kesalahan bahasa dan kesalahan tatabahasa dalam struktur ayat di dalam rumusan Bahasa Inggeris. Kajian ini juga membandingkan dan menghuraikan kejadian pemindahan struktur ayat di kalangan pelajar lemah, sederhana dan cemerlang di dalam rumusan Bahasa Inggeris. Responden kajian ini terdiri daripada 60 orang pelajar Melayu dengan 20 orang pelajar daripada kelas lemah, sederhana dan cemerlang daripada Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Matang Hilir. Data untuk kajian ini diperolehi melalui analisa daripada rumusan Bahasa Inggeris dengan menggunakan 'Error Analysis' dan soal selidik dengan Guru Bahasa Inggeris dijalankan untuk menyokong data kajian ini. Dapatan kajian mendapati empat kesalahan bahasa yang dilakukan oleh pelajar Melayu adalah kata ganti nama, kata kerja, kata kerja waktu dan ejaan. Tambahan, kesalahan sintaksis yg lazim dilakukan oleh pelajar Melayu adalah kata ganti nama, 'verbs inflection', 'copula be', 'determiner', 'preposition', 'plural marking' dan 'auxiliary verbs'. Kesalahan sintaksis yg dihasilkan oleh pelajar Melayu adalah kerana gangguan bahasa pertama, 'over-generalisation' dan kelemahan pelajar di dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Perbandingan di antara pelajar lemah, sederhana dan cemerlang menunjukkan pelajar lemah menghasilkan kurang kesalahan di dalam sesetengah jenis kesalahan sintaksis kerana pelajar demikian meniru perkataan dan ayat sebagai jawapan untuk penulisan rumusan di dalam Bahasa Inggeris.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

This chapter discusses overall purposes of the study. It includes introduction, background of the study, statement of problems, aim and objectives of study, research questions, significance of the study, operational definition of terms, scope of this study and finally the chapter review of this chapter.

1.1 Introduction

Malaysia is a multiracial country in which the people of Malaysia consist of different ethnics groups with their own native languages. When different ethnics groups meet, more than one language is used to communicate and due to this, it is not surprising that most of Malaysian are able to speak, understand and communicate more than one languages. This phenomenon is called multilingual or multilingualism

as three or more languages are used by individual or community to serve a wider communication in different context and situation (Cruz-Ferreira, 2003; Carter, 1993).

Multilingual society leads to the occurrence of ‘language contact’. Language contact occurs when speakers who do not share the same language meet and need to communicate. When two or more languages come into contact, there are probabilities of language mixing to emerge as the features of vocabulary, pronunciation or grammar are taken over from one language into another (Odlin, 1989; Trask, 1997). Thus, the emergence of language contact will lead to code switching, borrowing, cross linguistic influences or language transfer and other outcomes that will be produced by the speaker in order to communicate (Camilleri, 2004).

In this context, in learning a target language such as English, the speakers who have their own native language tend to mix and transfer their native language into the target language in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. This habit will greatly affect the second language acquisition as the speakers tend to transfer their first language into the second language performance, and at the same time might impede the acquisition of the second language.

1.2 Background of the Study

The first language, mother tongue or a native language of a speaker is widely considered as the most influential factors that affects the second language acquisition. It is always assumed that the speakers or learners rely on their native language in speaking or writing in the second language. As cited in Gass and Selinker (2001), Lado in his book *Linguistics Across Cultures* (1957) stated that:

“individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign

language and culture – both productively and when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture, and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and culture as practiced by natives. (p.2)”

When one tries to acquire the language that they do not know well, one tends to transfer or use their knowledge in their mother tongue to construct the target language. This process is called interference or language transfer. In Siegel (2003), Faerch and Kasper (1987) defined transfer as ‘psycholinguistic procedure by means of which L2 learners activate their L1 knowledge in developing or using their interlanguage’. In other words, transfer occurs when the learners using their first language or their native language in developing the second or target language.

According to Odlin (1989) “Transfer is the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and sometimes imperfectly) acquired”. One may transfer his mother tongue patterns into the target language if both languages share linguistics features or similarities such as alphabetical system or particular grammar categories. This cross-linguistic similarity can facilitate the acquisition of the target language. For instance, if first language and target language share the same pattern of syntax, it can facilitate the learner to acquire the grammar of the target language. This situation is called positive transfer of facilitation, in which help the learners to learn and acquire the target language.

If there is mismatch or difference in the first language and target language, the negative transfer or interference will take place. Usually, the negative transfer contributes to the production of errors. For example, if both first language and target language do not share the same pattern of syntax, learner might transfer the structure of the first language to construct the sentence in the target language, hence, this situation impede the acquisition of the target language.

Language transfer, whether positive or negative can occurs in syntax, lexis, phonetics and phonology, discourse, semantics and writing systems. At the same time, positive and negative transfer can show in the learner's performance, such as reading, writing and speaking.

Instead of language transfer in syntax, lexis, phonetics and semantics, one may also transfer the habits of his native grammar rules into the second language writing or speaking. This transfer is refer to syntactic transfer which, one may produce an error while transferring his mother tongue rules in the second language performance especially in the sentential level of the second language sentences.

1.3 Statement of Problems

Since our country is a multiracial country, the students are proficient in their mother tongue such as Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin, Tamil, Iban, Melanau and etcetera. Due to this, there is probability that the mother tongue of the students will influence their performance in English, especially in speaking, reading and writing. For example, Malay students may have difficulties in structuring sentence in English;

Example: I got ***result exam very good last semester**

I got a good result for last semester examination.

Saya dapat **keputusan peperiksaan yang sangat baik semester lepas**

Moreover, students also tend to directly translate the word from Malay to English.

Example: Ali *story the story to his father.

Ali tells the story to his father.

Ali **menceritakan** cerita itu kepada ayahnya.

From these examples, it shows that first language or mother tongue interfere students' learning and acquisition of the target language especially in speaking and writing. Thus, this study intends to discover the mother tongue influence of Malay language at the sentential level of students' writing in English.

1.4 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to investigate the occurrence of syntactic transfer and the production of syntactic errors produced by Form Four Malay students in SMK Matang Hilir in English summary writing. The objectives of the study are stated below:

- 1) To identify the language errors and common syntactic errors made by Malay students English summary writing.
- 2) To explain the occurrence of syntactic transfer produced by Malay students English summary writing.
- 3) To compare the syntactic transfer by produced by advanced, intermediate and low proficiency of Malay students in English summary writing.
- 4) To explain the difference of syntactic errors made by advanced, intermediate and and low students in English summary writing.

1.5 Research Questions

The research questions of this study are:

- 1) What are the main language errors produced by Malay students in English summary writing?
- 2) What is/are the common syntactic errors produced by Malay students in English summary writing ?
- 3) Why do/does the syntactic transfer occurs in English summary writing among Malay students?
- 4) Does proficiency affect the use of syntactic transfer in Malay student's writing?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study will give insight and benefits for both language teachers and students. The awareness of transfer errors, especially in syntax area would assist English teacher to pinpoint the transfer problems face by Malays students in the written English especially in summary writing. In addition, language teachers can use the knowledge of language transfer in creating ways to teach English language effectively.

A part from that, teacher might inform the students about the similarities and differences of their mother tongue language and the target language. As consequences, the awareness of similarities and differences in both languages can facilitate the students to learn and acquire the target language. In addition, the awareness of syntactic transfer can facilitates students to learn English language effectively as they are aware and be more conscious in producing written English that concerns with grammar and the sentence structure of the target language.

1.7 Operational Definition of Terms

Language error

Error refers to use of wrong rules or a misuse of right rules or known as 'breach the code' in generating syntactically, phonologically and semantically well-formed sentences (Corder, 1973). Language error refers to the errors produced in the surface structure of the sentences that cover the language areas such as noun, pronoun, article, spelling, word order, adjective and etc. (Camilleri, 2004)

Syntactic transfer

Syntax means sentence structure in which deals with the grammar of sentences. (Cruz-Ferreira, 2003). In addition, Tan, (n.d) define transfer as the 'influence' of the first language habits in order to acquire the second language (Ellis, 1997). Due to these definitions, syntactic transfer refers to the mother tongue influence at the sentential level of second language sentence (Odlin, 1989). Thus, this study focuses on the error produces in the sentential level that covers grammatical and sentence structure in the students' written English.

Syntactic error

A syntactic error refers to the errors in grammatical and sentence structure at the sentential level in the written English. The examples of syntactic errors are verbal inflexion, omission of article and determiner, tenses, word order, pro-drops and etc. (Charlene Tan, 2005)

Native language

Native language is the language that a person acquires in early childhood because it is spoken in the family. The native language is often the first language a child acquires but there are no exceptions. The terms native language is used

synonymously with first language. In the context of this study, native language refers to the mother tongue or LI of an individual (Richards, Platt and Platt, 1992)

Malay students

Malay students refer to students whom first language is Malay language and use Malay language as primary language in home or daily interaction. (Chitavelu, Sithamparam, and Teh, 1995)

Advanced student

Advanced learners are competent user of the target language and obtain high scores in aptitude and intelligence (Chitavelu, et. al. 1995). In this study, advanced student refers to the Malay students who are in the advanced classes such as 4 Science 1 and 4 Science 2 with the high level of proficiency in English.

Intermediate student

Chitavelu, et. al., (1995) define intermediate students as average students in the school. In this study, intermediate learners refer to Malay students who are in the middle class such as 4A and 4B with the intermediate level of proficiency in English.

Low student

Low learners is define as students with 'lower intelligence and scores as they need more time to grasps a concept or to complete a tasks' (Chitavelu, et. al. 1995). As in this study, low learner refers to those students who are in the last or second last classes such as 4G and 4F with the low level of proficiency in the English language.

1.8 Scope of the Study

This study only covers the language transfer at the sentential level which focuses on grammatical errors and word order produced by Malay students in constructing written English especially in English summary writing. Moreover, this study will not cover other areas of transfer such as phonology, morphemes, or writing strategies transfer

1.9 Chapter Review

This chapter discusses the introduction and background of the study, problem statement that focuses on the issues of the research, aim and objectives, research questions, significance of conducting the study, operational definition of terms used in this research, and scope of this research. The next chapter is the literature review of this study which discusses the related studies regarding to the topic of this research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Preview

This chapter presents the literature review of the study. It will discuss the related literature regarding to this study and studies that have been done earlier regarding to language transfer and the theory of second language acquisition.

2.1 Language Transfer

Multiracial society consists of different groups of people that live together and have their own mother tongue. When these people need to communicate, this situation leads to the occurrence of language contact, in which different speakers that do not share the same language deals with each other and lead to the emersion of language mixing, new dialects, code switching, transfer and other language varieties (Odlin, 1989; Jacobson, (2000) as cited in Camilleri, 2004).

The speakers possibly take the features of pronunciation, vocabulary or grammar from one language, especially the features of their mother tongue language into their second or third language (Trask, 1997). When these people try to acquire the new language that they do not know well, the process is known as psycholinguistic process and it often called as cross-linguistic influence or language transfer. Faerch and Kasper (1987) defined transfer as ‘psycholinguistic procedure by means of which L2 learners activate their L1 knowledge in developing or using their interlanguage’ as the speakers use or carrying over their first language or mother tongue feature or patterns into the target language in terms of pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary (Siegel, 2003).

Odlin, (1989) define transfer as “the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and sometimes imperfectly) acquired”. In other words, language transfer will take place if there are similarities and differences between first language and the target language learned.

Furthermore, if there are similarities between the first and the target language, positive transfer will occur in which can facilitates the acquisition of the target language. For instances, similarities in syntactic structures can facilitate the acquisition of grammar as learner speaks a language with syntax that similar to the target language. The learner would have less difficulty with articles, word order and relative clauses in performing the target language (Odlin, 1989; Ellis, 1997).

If there are mismatch between the first and the target language, negative transfer will take place and this situation might impede the acquisition of the target language. Hence, the learners are prone to produce errors in performing the target language. According to Odlin (1989), errors that are produced due to the negative transfer can be categorized into three types which are substitution; in which one may

use mother tongue form into the target language, calques; literal translation and alteration of structure. Instead of producing errors, negative transfer also can cause underproduction; in which one may produce few or no examples of a target language structure, overproduction; which is consequences of underproduction and misinterpretation that one may misinterpret the target language messages when applying their first language over the target language messages.

Camilleri (2004) discovers that negative transfer occurs in the sentence level of student's writing in the target language as the students make syntactical and lexical error such as word order, preposition, the use of verbs and idioms in the sentences. The sources of errors produces by the students are mainly due to the literal translation and L1 form that caused from transferring the first language into the target language. The study identifies that every time an error occurs in the students' writing, there are mismatch between the L1 and L2 features.

Apart from that, a study by Cheong, Cecilia Yin Mei and Chowung, Daniel T'chiang found out that the low proficiency level of students in University Malaya from Faculty of Education and Bussiness and Accounting produce an errors in their written English in terms of lexis, grammar and syntax. Malay students tend to omit the 'article' such as 'a', 'an', and 'the' in their written work as in Malay language the articles is not used in certain sentence pattern or structure.

Moreover, the students also translate structures or phrases directly from their native language into their written English such as the phrases 'Di sini' to 'at here'. The study shows that students transfer their native language rules into their second language performance in terms of grammar and syntax as there are differences between the L1 language and the second language.

2.2 Syntactic Transfer and Related Studies

There are enormous studies regarding to language transfer that covers linguistic subsystems such as morphology, syntax, phonetics, phonology, writing systems, discourse in both positive and negative.

2.2.1 What is Syntactic Transfer?

Syntactic transfer refers to the negative transfer of syntactic level in the second language writing. It covers grammatical, word order or sentence structure errors in the sentential level of written English. In this study, syntactic transfer is also known as syntactic influences that occur due to the mother tongue interference in the written English of Malay students (Odlin, 1989).

2.2.2 Types of Syntactic Errors

There are few types of syntactic features commonly produced by Malay students which can cause syntactic errors in the sentences (Charlene Tan, 2005; Marlyna Maros, Tan and Khazriyati (2007) and Camilleri, 2004):

- i) Verbal inflexion - the verbs are in the 'uninflected' form in the sentences where the singular present tense and past tense are not morphologically marked.
- ii) Plural marking - the plural nouns are not appropriately marked
- iii) Articles - the articles are usually omitted and wrongly used in a sentences

- iv) Pro-drops - the subject or pronoun in a sentences are dropped or omitted
- v) Object-preposing - place the object before another constituent in the sentence so that the sentence has an Object-Subject-Verb word order. This error occurs due to the influence of mother tongue word order as topic or subject determines a sentences structure.
- vi) Determiner - determiner such as 'the' is omitted and wrongly used.
- vii) Copula 'be' - copula 'be' such as 'is, are, was, were' are omitted or wrongly used in a sentence.
- viii) Word order - refers to the sentence structures in a sentence. The errors of sentence structure produce by Malay students normally caused from direct translation.
- ix) Preposition - the preposition such as 'in, for, to' are wrongly used.
- x) Auxiliary Verbs - the auxiliary verbs such as do, be, have are wrongly used, sometimes omitted in a sentence.

2.2.3 Related Study

A study by Charlene Tan (2005) titled 'English or Singlish? The Syntactic Influences of Chinese and Malay on the Learning of English in Singapore' shows that that both Malay and Chinese students produce syntactic errors in the sentential level in their written English. The errors produced by both Malay and Chinese students are due to their mother tongue interferences such as verbal inflexion, plural marking,

passive form articles pro-drop, adverbs and object proposing. The participant of the study tend to omit the use of articles as in their mother tongue, article are not used in certain sentence pattern or structure.

Besides, Marlyna Maros, et. al., (2007) also discovers that Malay language plays important factor that hinder English acquisition. The study reported that the students' first language in which Malay language do interferes the acquisition of English grammar and lead to the production of errors in their written English. The frequent errors produce by the students are; the use of article; subject verb agreement and, the use of copula 'be'. For instances, Malay students tend to omit and overuse the subject verb agreement in the second language writing because in Malay, there is no such rule that requires inflection based on the number of the subject.

Furthermore, the behaviorist theory view transfer as mother tongue habits that can affect or influence the acquisition of second language habits and there are probability in applying the habits into the second language performance, hence affecting the second language acquisition and producing error. Wei Wu (2006) discovered that the Chinese EFL students in Yantai University transferring their first language habits into the second language habits in the sentential level as the students writes the sentences without subject because in Chinese, writing sentences without subject can be accepted. However in English the sentences have to have subjects as the word order of English sentences is S-V-O.

Hence, based on the studies discussed above, this study focuses on the error produces in the sentential level that covers grammatical and sentence structure in the students' written English.