

A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS STUDY ON THE
INFLUENCE OF FIRST LANGUAGE (L1) IN
WRITING ENGLISH ESSAYS AMONG
FORM TWO SECONDARY
SCHOOL STUDENTS

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SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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LANGUAGE (L1) IN WRITING ENGLISH ESSAYS AMONG FORM
TWO SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the interference of L1 in the writing of L2 tenses with specific reference to the interference of Bahasa Melayu (L1) in English (L2). Furthermore, this study is also influenced either positively or negatively, by the first language. This study also seeks to identify ways to minimize the influence of L1 (Bahasa Melayu) into L2 (English) tenses writing. This is a qualitative case study. The data collection instruments were document analysis and interview. The data was analysed using content analysis. Total of 69 essays with the title my family, my holidays and If I were a millionaire respectively were analysed from 23 students in terms of grammatical errors especially in the usage of simple present tense, simple past tense, and simple future tense. From the findings, it was found that first language highly interferes in students' writing in simple present tense, and simple past tense. It is found that students committed more than two errors which were 82.7% in using present simple tense, 69.6% for simple past tense, and 30.3% for simple future tense. In fact, the teachers who were interviewed suggested that the government should revert to the previous curriculum, which focused on grammar drills and using grammar translation method. In addition, there are a few methods recommended by the students were cognitive in nature in improving their tenses using reading, writing and listening skills. For instance, reading novels and listening to songs. The study has come to conclude that there is a considerable influence of first language in the writing of English language among the students. The implication of this study suggested that teachers can implement new ways to improve students' writing skills in term of correct usage of grammar. However, additional research should be conducted on other skills especially speaking skills.



KAJIAN ANALISIS KONTRASTIF MENGENAI PENGARUH BAHASA PERTAMA (L1) DALAM PENULISAN KARANGAN BAHASA INGGERIS DI KALANGAN PELAJAR-PELAJAR SEKOLAH MENENGAH TINGKATAN DUA

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh bahasa pertama iaitu Bahasa Melayu di dalam penulisan bahasa kedua, iaitu Bahasa Inggeris di kalangan pelajar-pelajar sekolah tingkatan dua. Tambahan pula, pembelajaran ini juga dipengaruhi sama ada secara positif atau negatif, oleh bahasa pertama. Kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti cara untuk meminimumkan pengaruh L1 (Bahasa Melayu) ke dalam penulisan tenses L2 (Bahasa Inggeris). Ini adalah kajian kes kualitatif. Instrumen pengumpulan data ialah analisis dokumen dan temu bual. Sebanyak 69 eassy dengan tajuk 'my family', 'my holidays' dan 'If I were a millionaire' masing-masing telah dianalisis daripada 23 pelajar dari segi kesalahan tatabahasa terutamanya dalam penggunaan simple present tense, dan simple past tense. Didapati pelajar melakukan lebih daripada dua kesalahan iaitu 82.7% dalam menggunakan present simple tense, 69.6% untuk simple past tense dan 30.3% untuk simple future tense. Malah, guru-guru yang ditemu bual mencadangkan agar kerajaan kembali kepada kurikulum sebelum ini, yang memfokuskan kepada latih tubi tatabahasa dan menggunakan Grammar traslation Method. Selain itu, terdapat beberapa kaedah yang disarankan oleh pelajar adalah bersifat kognitif dalam meningkatkan tenses mereka menggunakan kemahiran membaca, menulis dan mendengar. Contohnya, membaca novel, dan mendengar lagu. Semua ini adalah bukti klasik yang menunjukkan bahawa bahasa pertama pelajar memberi kesan negatif terhadap karangan mereka, menyebabkan prestasi bahasa Inggeris rendah di peringkat sekolah menengah. Sebagai kesimpulan, lebih banyak tindakan perlu diambil untuk mengajar analisis kontras untuk pemahaman yang lebih baik tentang perbezaan kala antara Bahasa Melayu dan Bahasa Inggeris. Daripada dapatan kajian, didapati bahasa pertama sangat mempengaruhi penulisan pelajar. Implikasi kajian ini mencadangkan agar guru-guru dapat melaksanakan kaedah baharu untuk meningkatkan kemahiran menulis murid dari segi penggunaan tatabahasa yang betul. Walau bagaimanapun, kajian tambahan perlu dijalankan ke atas kemahiran lain terutamanya kemahiran bertutur.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

SLA	Second language acquisition
L1	First language
L2	Second language

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The introductory chapter describes the context and framework in five main sections. The following section outlines the context of second language writing in Malaysia. The second section describes the role of English language in Malaysia contexts as a second language. The next section outlines the purpose, problem statement, need for the study, significance of the study, the research questions, and definition of terms.

1.1 Background of the study

Malaysian students often have more than one language at their disposal when writing as second language learners compared to native learners or English. Denizer (2017)

stated that the term "mother tongue" encompasses not just the language learned from one's mother, but also the speaker's dominant and native languages. Therefore, learners should use both the first and second languages while writing in the second language for cognitive operations (Ang, Rahim, Tan, and Salehuddin, 2011). Masood, Shafi, Rahim and Darwesh (2020) stated that due to geographical distance, a few languages have a similar structure and some languages have different structures. Since they interactively use more than one language, the structure and context are often somewhat confusing (Darus and Ching, 2009). Students, according to Nor et al., (2019), spend around 11 to 12 years in elementary and secondary school learning English, yet many of them are still unable to grasp the language after attending secondary school. As a result, the majority of students in national schools use Malay as the primary means of education (Onwubiko, 2012).

In the realm of second language writing, one clear and salient feature which is fundamentally distinct from first language writing is that second language writers either switch back and forth between their first language and second language in order to solve a problem. Actually, when composing in the second language, they are struggling (Darus and Ching, 2009). In fact, Gonca (2018) pointed out that writing is a demanding activity involving several elements, such as drafting ideas, organising, revision, content editing, vocabulary, mechanics, and cohesion. In L2 writing, when a writing assignment is given, L2 students are often inclined to use their L1 writing abilities at the first beginner level (Abeywickrama, 2011).

To facilitate the comprehension of students, English language teachers use code switching as they think it saves time and it is useful. Then & Ting (2011), reported that



reiteration and quotation were the primary reasons for teacher code switching in Sarawak, Malaysia. According to Bui & Vu (2017) on Lao students studying English in Vietnam also indicated that code switching is an effective method of teaching as it allowed students to learn the English language better, especially those with low proficiency levels of the target language. Cheng (2003) further indicated that speakers would code switch when they lack specific vocabulary as a coping mechanism in order that their intended meaning gets across during a conversation at the shortest time possible. This was observed in the study by Badrul Hisham & Kamaruzaman (2009), which showed that low English language proficiency students reacted positively towards the teacher, the lesson and their learning.

Azelin Mohamed Noor, Abdul Mutalib Embong and Osaro Aigbogun (2015)

stated that other than the students' incompetence to write and speak accurately in English, they were English language phobic and this phobia extended to other subjects taught in the language. Schools should also ensure that all learners are inspired and numerous ways of motivation should be implemented (Muriungi & Mbui, 2013). Despite the knowledge that having strong writing skills would help them professionally, Chaudhary & Zahrani (2020) highlighted that motivating second language learners about the importance of writing skills is difficult.

Unfortunately, according to Muniandy et al. (2010), English is educated formally from Year One, some learners still find it challenging at secondary level.

Between 1950's and 1960's many studies were carried out on first and second language learning. Behaviourists were the first psychological profession to enter the





field of first and second language learning and they were dominating this field of study. Previously, it had been thought that repetition, imitation and reinforcement were methods that assisted in the field of first language only (Abler, 2006). Later methods of first and second language learning were shaped by behaviourists' ideas (Abeywickrama, 2011). They acknowledged that second language learning involves the creation of a new set of habits (Lin and Texas, 2014). This belief was based on behaviourist theory of language learning where learning was equated with habit formation (Yu, 2011). Consequently, the interest in language learning was focused on the role of mother tongue as the failure to gain the new habits of the second language was thought to be related to first language (Abeywickrama, 2011).

Many behaviorists argue that L1 interference is major problem for L2 learners.

This situation is dominant in L2 learner's productive and receptive skills which are greatly influenced by not merely by L1 patterns but also includes the factors of how great the similarities or differences between L1 and L2 languages are (Erarslan and Hol, 2014). For instance, if L1 and L2 are similar in feature and characteristics, then the interference is not as great and prominent (Bennui, 2008). As most of the strategies are similar in L1 and L2 therefore L2 learners may be able to transfer from L1 to L2 writing (Erarslan and Hol, 2014). Furthermore, in L2 writing, transfer is considered a strategy (Shaozhong, 2001). Consequently, L2 writers make use of their L1 transfer and learning strategies when writing in L2. Therefore, errors take place when learners inappropriately transfer some features of L1 in their L2 writing (El-dali, 2012).

Learners who have good mastery of L2 are able to apply good transfer strategies in L1 (Abeywickrama, 2011). However, if the command of the language is





inadequate, they are unable to use L1 in L2 writing effectively. This is an unconscious process and results in negative transfer (Gvarishvili, 2013). This is one issue the researcher would like to investigate in this present study.

Bahasa Melayu inferences in English language are one of the major sources in committing syntactic errors. Gedion, Tati, and Peter (2018) pointed out that students had erroneous sentence structure as a result of directly translating Malay terms into English. In fact, Derakhshan and Karimi (2015) mentioned that when learners of second language want to write or speak in the target language, they tend to rely on their first language structures. Furthermore, first language (L1) or mother tongue has negative influences in writing English language (L2) which greatly impacts the acquisition of English language skills among secondary school students (Muriungi & Mbui, 2013).

Moreover, Onwubiko (2012) stressed that the matter of concern now is how to raise the level of proficiency of the English language in Malaysia to a level as high if not greater than during the days of the English medium. A majority of students in national schools use Bahasa Melayu as a main medium of instruction. National school subjects are taught in Bahasa Melayu, with the exception of English language subjects (Onwubiko, 2012). It is difficult to think in English while writing in English, since L1 interferes with L2 written texts (Bennui, 2008).

This research will therefore investigate the interference of lower secondary students with L1 (Bahasa Melayu) over L2 (English language). In the tenses and other linguistic items of L2 writing, the focus of this analysis is mainly on instances of L1 interference with L2. This research also aims to investigate the reasons for the negative





and positive transfer of tenses and other linguistic aspects from L1 to L2 and evaluate the approach of error analysis to minimise tense errors in L2 writing.

1.1.1 Role of English in Malaysia Context as a Second Language

According to Thirusanku & Melor (2012), English is spoken and used as a second language (L2) in the countries which were typically ex-colonies of the United Kingdom or the United States including Malaysia, Philippines, India and Nigeria. Malaysia is one of the Asian countries that are espousing a bilingual system of education. Bahasa Melayu is the official language whereas English language is the second language in the perspective of the Malaysian education system. The aim is to establish a balance between national and international needs and challenges manifested through linguistic educational policies (Gill & Kirkpatrick, 2013). English language is made a mandatory subject at all levels of education implying its existence among strong indigenous languages, wide use in higher education, sometimes official functions as the language of politics, the media, and other such domains (Thirusanku & Melor). People study English as a second language because educational institutions require it (Masood et al., 2020).

In the Malaysian education system, a formal style of English language learning takes place in classrooms; and Jeon-Ellis, Debski and Wigglesworth (2005) cited in Darmi and Albion, 2013 define the L2 classroom as a social setting where students bring themselves and their prior experiences, where they try to form relationships and participate and engage in tasks in ways that best suit their social needs.





Malaysia was ranked with the highest English proficiency level. According to the EF EPI (Education First, English Proficiency Index), which is a global education centre that specialises in educational travel, academic degrees, language training and cultural exchange Malaysia came out first followed by Hong Kong, South Korea and Japan. The Asian countries were ranked at five different proficiency levels; very high, high, moderate, low and very low (NST 7, April 2011; cited in Thirusanku & Melor, 2012, p. 11). The report released on March 30, 2012 shows that Malaysia was the only Asian country rated with a high English proficiency level.

Azman (2016) stated that the inclusion of the English language as a subject in the national education curriculum of Malaysia is mandatory and guided by the language in education policy. However, it is not compulsory for the students to pass the subject towards completing their education at the primary or secondary levels. Even so, the role and status of the English language is institutionalized as an important Second language (English as a second language) in the Education Ordinance since 1957 and reaffirmed in the Education Act (Government of Malaysia 1961 and 1996) and the National Education Policy issued in 1970 (Ministry of Education 2012). Meanwhile, Bahasa Melayu is proclaimed as the national language and as the medium of instruction at national public schools.

In Malaysia, the English language is introduced to a child as early as preschool, at the young age of 5-6 years old. It continues to be taught as a compulsory subject in the national curriculum at the primary (6-12 years old), secondary school (13-17 years old), as well as post-secondary and tertiary levels of education (18 plus onwards). In sum, the approximate number of years the ordinary Malaysian who completes his or





her formal education from preschool to tertiary levels (undergraduate degree) is on average between 14-15 years and learned English.

Although it is established that a Malaysian child is taught the English language from the age of 6, early English language education does not assure effective acquisition of the language, as evident in the Malaysian scenario. Hayes (2014) in his assessment of English provision in primary schools revealed that international comparisons in the Asia pacific region by Nunan (2003) and reconfirmed by Bauldauf et al. (2011), as well as Kaplan et al. (2011), found policy decisions to lower the starting age to introduce English in the primary level has generally been unsuccessful. Azman (2016) points out that they underlined that limited success of the policy is mainly because of insufficient trained and skilled teachers who are not competent in the language themselves, mismatch between curriculum and pedagogical realities, limited time dedicated to language teaching and learning, insufficient and inappropriate learning resources, as well as increased fear of language endangerment.

Azman (2016), also posited in the same way, the Malaysian situation conspicuously exemplifies the aforementioned findings, where despite being taught the language since Year One or Year Three, at the national and national-type schools, respectively, Malaysian students, in general, have been incapable to achieve a reasonable level of competency. It was reported in 2013 that less than 50% of the students who had completed six years of primary education were literate in the English language (Government of Malaysia (GoM), 2016). According to JobStreet.Com, this problem has increasingly become serious in the current years with regards to graduate unemployment, where low English proficiency is cited (56%) as one of the main



reasons for not hiring. This situation directly posed a threat to the accomplishment of Vision 2020 – which in accordance with GoM 1996 is the nations’ aspiration to be fully developed and economically competitive.

According to Musa et al. (2012), numerous attempts have been made both nationally and individually in the effort to enhance the mastery and proficiency level of English language among Malaysian students. One of the suggestions was to provide a more conducive learning environment to make the learning process more meaningful. As posited by Musa et al. (2012), with the change of the economic status of Malaysia in the last two decades, the demand for bilingual students especially from the tertiary level has increased. Thus, there is a genuine need to boost the mastery and proficiency level of English language to cope with these developments and new challenges (Musa

1.1.2 Language Policy in Malaysia

Mohd Tohar, Ab Halim & Ku Samsu (2017) have mentioned that the primary role of language in a multi-ethnic society is to be an instrument of solidarity that unites people of various races through the sharing of opinions, world views and cultures based on a country’s national identity. Still, the issue of upholding the rightful position of the national language in Malaysia is still continuing, whether at the level of the policy makers or that of the masses.



As a former British colony with close diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom, Malaysia has a great regard for the English language. One of the government's main concerns is keeping up the standard of the language (Mohd Tohar, Ab Halim & Ku Samsu, 2017).

Since Malaysian independence, English language teachers have conducted their classes against a backdrop of continual education reforms. The most significant of these reforms was the change of the medium of instruction from English to Bahasa Melayu in 1961, which has affected the standard of English in the country. The change of the medium of instruction produces an education system which is more 'nationalistic in nature' (Pandian, 2002: 36) however, Mohamed et al. (2008) point out that pupils' proficiency has decreased following the change of medium of instruction. Aruna (2014) & Jalleh (2013) mentioned that ironically, the media blame English language teachers for the decreasing standards rather than the system itself.

Recent reforms in the Malaysian education system have mainly centred on language policy, which has put more pressure on English language teachers as they are at the frontline for the implementation of the new reforms. The most controversial reform is the policy that changed the medium of instruction for teaching Mathematics and Science from Bahasa Melayu to English. This policy, referred to as ETeMS (acronym for English for Teaching Mathematics and Science) was first implemented in 2003. The main aim was not to improve the mastery of the English language but to enable the students to learn Mathematics and Science in its most significant lingua franca to prepare them to compete in the era of globalization and hence improve the standard of human capital in the country. Even though the focus of the policy was not





on English as a subject, it added to the pressure put on English language teachers as they had to ensure that the students reached a particular level of proficiency for them to be able to use the language in Mathematics and Science classes. As pointed out by Norfaizah and Marzilah (2010), those who disagreed with the policy were mainly worried that the less proficient students would perform badly in Mathematics and Science due to their difficulties in understanding the medium of instruction. Furthermore, Selvaraj (2010), mentioned that teachers who were not proficient and were not trained to teach Mathematics and Science through English found it difficult to deliver the contents. However, these teachers appreciate the support given to them by English language teachers in the school (Tan, 2011). Some schools have introduced the buddy system to ensure the success of ETeMS where language teachers serve as language resource persons to the Mathematics and Science teachers (Tan, 2011). In the attempt to cope with the challenges of this new policy, teachers engage in collaborative works which are useful for their professional development.

The ETeMS policy was implemented in stages starting with the beginning of the 2003 school session at both the primary and secondary level. Those who were in Standard One and Form 1 in that year became the first cohorts under this new system. It was then completely implemented for all secondary students in 2007 and for all primary students in 2008. In 2012, four years after ETeMS had been entirely implemented at all levels of education, Tan Sri Muhyiddin, who was the new Minister of Education under a new Prime Minister, abolished the policy hence reversing the medium of instruction back to Bahasa Melayu. The MoE argued that this reversal was needed as ETeMS had resulted in lack of mastery of Science and Mathematics as





reflected in the results of the national exams where the number of students who scored good grades for the two subjects had decreased significantly.

In colonial English was the official language while Malay, Chinese and Tamil languages were deemed vernaculars. There were Malay intellectuals who reasoned that English in colonial Malaysia “produced a detrimental effect on the development of the Malay language as it was confined as the language of the home and the medium of instruction of a limited number of primary schools, Malay was deprived of the opportunity to develop” (Karim, 1981, p 45). It would therefore be timely to, as stated by Mitchell, “release the Malay from the menacles of British colonialism which was best represented in the vestiges of the English language” (Mitchell, 1993, 61). According to Watson (1983), while there may be some truth to what the Malay nationalists and intellectuals posited about the development of Malay language and indigenous rights, the rationalisations remain rhetoric because the compelling reason for the accelerated use of Malay especially in education, was to some extent predicated on the belief that the non-Malays had performed well in English medium schools and at tertiary institutions. As posited by Dumanig, David and Symaco (2012), the English educated urban non-Malays had a hegemony over major commerce/ business sectors as well as the professions while the largely rural Malay population had been by-passed.

Initially, the Malays, being the local population, formed religious schools. The Bahasa Melayu was also the lingua franca for business communication purposes until the British came to Malaya (the name for Malaysia before independence). According to Fei, Siong, Kim, & Azizah (2010), when the British administered Malaya from the eighteenth century till its independence, they did not only establish both English





medium primary and secondary schools but the English language became the lingua franca for business communication purposes. The growth in Malaysian industry around rubber and tin attracted immigrants from China and India into Malaya. As researched by Darmi and Albion (2013), the immigrants also realised the importance of education and they established their own schools where the mother tongue (MT) of each ethnic group was the medium of instruction (Darmi and Albi, 2013).

As Malaya gained independence in 1957, the leaders of the major communities reached a consensus to accept the Malay language as the national language, as a symbol of national unity. According to Omar (1997), the reasons Malay was chosen to fulfil this function includes its indiginity, its role as a lingua franca, its position as a major language, its possession of high literature, and the fact that it once had been an important language of administration and diplomacy in the Malay Archipelago.

Thus, Malay was adopted as the national language and a symbol of national unity although peculiarly, as Gill (2004), states less than 50 per cent of the population at that time spoke Malay.

As studied by David and Govindasamy (2003), even prior to the independence, political parties such as the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) had agreed that Malay would be the national language via a memorandum in August 1953. Therefore, it was not controversial to accept Malay as the national language and this has been confirmed by Article 152 of the Malaysian Constitution. However, the Constitutional framers did not phrase Malay as the “official” language, a stamp that allows the language to be used for all official





purposes. As a result, from 1957 to 1967, English continued to fulfil this official role and would have continued unchallenged but for the rise in linguistic nationalism amongst Malay nationalists. After independence, the leaders of the country chose to progress along a pragmatic path, pacifying minority communities of the continued role for their languages and at the same time assuring Malay nationalists of a greater role for Malay. It became obvious that the nationalists would not accept the idea of a multilingual nation. Discontented Malay nationalists were disgruntled with the plodding progress in the institutionalisation of Malay in the country and sought to champion Malay in political domains (vis-à-vis the official language, the language of administration, education and for all formal and official purposes) (David & Govindasamy, 2003).



Federation of Malaya School Teachers' Association and the Malay National Action Front, were also unsatisfied with the provisions of the 1967 National Language Act and criticised it as not elevating the status of Malay as the primary language of the nation because the Act asked for the continued use of English (Mitchell, 1993). From Chai's observation (1971), the opposition to the continued use of English is understandable as English came to be regarded not only as the language of colonial education but also, after independence, as an obstacle to the educational, social and economic advancement of the majority of Malays.

The policy of using Malay language as a medium of instruction was implemented and vernacular schools at least until primary level were allowed to remain. In attempts to enable students from vernacular schools to expeditiously transfer to



Malay medium secondary schools, transitional classes called Remove Classes were introduced in 1960 by the Rahman Talib Report. Pupils from Chinese, Tamil and at that point in time Malay medium primary schools, were required to undergo an extra year in these “remove classes” in the secondary school. This was to enable students from vernacular schools to become proficient in Malay or English as the situation required. With independence in 1957 and the consequent need for nation building, Malay was officially announced to be the national language of the country in 1967.

According to the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–2025, the Ministry seeks to cultivate students who are operationally proficient in both English and Bahasa Melayu.

The following actions were taken:

- Using one Bahasa Melayu curriculum and assessment standard across all schools;
- Introducing LINUS 2.0 (Literacy and Numeracy Screening for English Literacy) with an increased capacity to address English language literacy;
- Reinforcing the delivery of English language lessons, for example via the Oral Proficiency in English language for Secondary School (OPS English)
- Programme or “set” teaching whereby students are assembled based on their skill level;
- Intensifying testing and upskilling of all English language subject teachers;
- Introducing Bahasa Melayu and English language remedial interventions and support for students who find it difficult to keep up; and
- Providing access to learning an additional language at primary and

secondary level.

The LINUS programme underlined the imperative to ensure 100% of primary school children is literate in Bahasa Melayu and not less than 90% in English Language by the end of year Three (Government of Malaysia 2012, pp E 9, E12). Literacy and numeracy screenings are conducted by the school teachers in March, June and September every year. The instruments with 12 constructs are prepared by the Malaysian Examinations Syndicate and passed on to the district education offices to be distributed to schools. There are two parts to the screening which are written and oral. The screening can be conducted in class by the teacher any time within the stipulated time frame (Chen, The Star Online Newspaper, 2012).

- Encourage a unique shared identity between Malaysians anchored in the ability to be competent in the national language, Bahasa Melayu;
- Mould individuals that are equipped to work in a globalised economy where the English language is the international language of communication; and
- Provide opportunities for students to learn an additional language.

As the world grows more connected and competitive than it has ever been before, it is crucial that Malaysia capitalises on its inherent advantages to fortify its

position in the global economy. Neighbouring Asian education systems in China, South Korea, and Singapore are increasingly focused on development of students who are proficient in their national language, and the English language to maximise their employability in the global workforce. As stated in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, Malaysia needs to develop a similar employee value proposition.

As planned in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, competence in Bahasa Melayu will remain the cornerstone of Malaysia's language policy and focus will be on ascertaining that students across all ethnic groups are universally capable to learn and converse efficiently in the national language.

According to Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, Malaysian students' performance in English language is weaker compared to that in Bahasa Melayu. Merely 28% of students achieve at least a credit benchmarked to Cambridge 1119 in English language SPM. While performance in English language also differs by ethnicity, all three major ethnic groups fall significantly short of the 70% proficiency target. Only 23% Bumiputera, 42% Chinese and 35% Indian students achieve at least a Credit benchmarked to Cambridge 1119 (Exhibit 4-6). English language results are also the lowest of the core subjects at UPSR, PMR, and SPM level.

The fourth and most recently introduced reform, which essentially is extended from the MEB, is the launch of the English Language Education Roadmap for Malaysia 2015-2025, (Don et al. 2015). The roadmap which is progressively aligned with the MEB serves as a guide for English language curriculum developers and teachers to ensure that students achieve proficiency levels aligned to international standards,



benchmarked against the Common European Framework of Reference or CEFR. The reform holistically outlines the development of learners as competent users of the language to enable them to participate fully in both professional and academic contexts from schools up to tertiary level and also in teacher training. Aligning the system with an international standard (CEFR) is an element in the Malaysia Education Blueprint that aims to boost the level of education in the country to international standards.

According to Woolfolk (2010), Bahasa Melayu is the national language of the country while English becomes the second language in Malaysia. It is imperative to note that language is highly important for cognitive development because it provides a means to express ideas and ask questions, the categories and concepts for thinking, and the links between the past and the future.



Yunus, Sulaiman & Embi (2013), stated that English language has become the second most important language in Malaysia, after Bahasa Melayu as the country's national language. This comes to imply that English language is regarded as a second language or sometimes referred to the foreign language.

As maintained by Suliman (2014), in a community where Bahasa Melayu does not operate as their first language, English will somehow or rather turn to be third or perhaps foreign language to the students. Taking Sarawak for example, diverse races and ethnicities might affect the role of English in becoming the second language of the students. Their own mother tongue will functionally remain as a first language while Bahasa Melayu is commonly used in schools and interaction with other people in the community, will become the second language. English will be less prioritised in the



students' linguistics repertoire if the students know how to speak other languages. Hence, this study posits on investigating the influence of mother tongue/native language in students' speech production in second language, focusing on the students in the rural area of Sarawak.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Despite spending years studying English in a formal context, the quality of the language among Malaysian students is deteriorating. Writing in a second language (L2) has always been extremely challenging for language learners. Bailey and Almusharraf (2022) writing in a second language (L2) is an essential component of many courses, and emergency remote teaching (ERT) makes this even more important because online writing tasks compensate for the absence of offline. Mukundan et.al (2013) stated that in Malaysia, researchers have pointed out the unsatisfactory writing skills after years of taking English lessons at school. To date, most Malaysian students and local graduates have been found to be incompetent users of the English language and to struggle to construct a proper English sentence (Kadir, Hassan & Yusof (2020); Meikeng, 2015; Musa, Koo, & Azman, 2012). The writing may have occasionally become monotonous as a result of phrase repetition brought on by a limited vocabulary. This concurs with Chandran et al. (2019), who assert that mastering the art of writing is more difficult than mastering other abilities. Song (2018) believed, however, that students' mistakes committed when learning a second language did not always reflect their level of competency in the field. He also believed that the students might get over their obstacles and produce better writing if they continually practised.



Additionally, Ibrahim, Wan & Othman, Zarina (2021) pointed out that students are classified as advanced, intermediate, and weak based on the item analysis conducted following a summative assessment at the school level. This finding was based on a pilot study conducted by one of the researchers who is also a teacher. Students who struggle with writing frequently make grammar errors.

The fundamental problem is that students' essays are badly influenced by their L1 (Bahasa Melayu) in L2 (English) tenses writing. The students use verbs without a correct tense due to transfer of L1 (Bahasa Melayu) as Bahasa Melayu has no tenses. According to Maros, Tan & Khazriyati Salehuddin (2007) that this difficulty may also be attributed to the environment in which language acquisition occurs. In addition, according to Mohammadi & Mustafa (2020) analysing writing errors is thought to be crucial for enhancing students' writing. In fact, Dipolog-Ubanan, Genevieve (2016) stressed that the number of mistakes students make while writing in English is one of the prevalent concerns among teachers. In the case of Malay students, most of them tend to use the Malay language when interacting with their family members and friends in their home environment as well as in school. They also use their mother tongue to converse with their non-Malay peers who are fluent in the Malay language too. Hence, they hardly use English outside the language classroom, resulting in weak performances in their writing, reading, speaking and listening skills. The problem is most obvious when it comes to examinations. It is always difficult to find students writing their essays with very few grammatical errors; specifically in the use of tenses (Maros, Tan & Khazriyati Salehuddin) and this is evidence in research carried out among Form 1 students from Pahang, Selangor and Melaka. Song (2018) study has also found that the students' first language, Bahasa Melayu, has an influence on their acquisition of English





as a second language since they cognitively hold the first language system that they mostly use in informal or formal situations. As can be observed from the samples, direct translation from L1 and erroneous sentence structure are two types of errors that have simultaneously surfaced as a result of this. This is the area in which Form 2 secondary school students from a national school need to be thoroughly investigated.

A study carried out proved that students face difficulty to shift from school learning culture to university learning culture and as a result lack the convention of academic writing needed to write well in an academic discipline (Krishnakumari, Paul Evanson & Selvanayagam, 2010). Abdullah and Lin (2021) makes the claim that Malaysian students who are ESL learners find it difficult to write in the language and that it is a difficult skill to master. Paltridge (2018) contends that despite the fact that writing is a skill that students may pick up at an early stage of language acquisition, students do not learn the nature of writing because it is typically covered in the context of teaching and learning grammar. Very few studies were conducted to investigate the above problem especially among secondary students in Malaysia. This is the gap the researcher is concerned about since limited researches have been conducted to investigate the problem among tertiary students.

The researcher decided to embark on this research during the researcher's teaching practicum. The researcher found that the students of the particular school always had the tendency to use the direct translation method into their writing. The researcher observed that whenever they did this, their answers were heavily influenced by their first language. This observation is based on the researcher's intuition as a





multilingual speaker who has had experience, in terms of first language interference, while teaching English language.

Another issue is that students are highly depending on code-switching in L1 (Bahasa Melayu) by teachers during L2 (English) lessons. According to Souriyavongsa, Rany, Jafre Zainol Abidin, and Lai Mei (2013), students are typically weak in learning the English language in many parts of the world, especially in those where English is not spoken as the first language. The majority of learners indicated that English teachers are not well trained, for example using their first language when teaching, so they cannot accomplish well and this influenced the interest of the learners. A majority (71.4%) of the teachers admitted that they code switch at times when teaching English in the classroom (Lee, 2010). Numerous L2 studies other than English (Ecuadorian, Spanish, Arabic, Thai, Tamil, Amharic) have shown that L2 learners used their L1 and L2 while writing in L2 for different purposes (Bhela, 1999; Bennui, 2008; Hussein & Mohammad, 2011; Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013; Yigzaw, 2013; Solano et.al, 2014). In reality, many students find it difficult to write comprehensible essays using proper English grammar and diction, which calls for a strong mastery of certain language conventions (Karjono, 2018). Fitria (2018) stated that teachers might learn about students' weaknesses in learning a second language by examining students' writing errors with a discourse analytical method, teachers might learn about students' weaknesses in learning a second language. Then, teachers can plan interventions to aid students in learning a second language. According to this study, teachers were able to identify errors and writing patterns that their students were making.



1.3 Objectives of the study

- To investigate the interference of L1 in the writing of L2 tenses with specific reference to the interference of Bahasa Melayu (L1) in English (L2).
- To investigate the L2 (English) tenses which had been transferred negatively and positively from L1 (Bahasa Melayu).
- To identify ways to minimize the influence of L1 (Bahasa Melayu) into L2 (English) tenses writing

1.4 Research Questions

- What are the interferences of L1 tenses in the writing of L2 with specific reference to the interference of Bahasa Melayu (L1) into English (L2)?
- How have L2 tenses been transferred negatively and positively from L1 (Bahasa Melayu)?
- What are the ways to minimize the influence of L1 (Bahasa Melayu) into L2 (English) tenses writing?

1.5 Significance of the study

This study is apparently to investigate the interference of L1 (Bahasa Melayu) in lower secondary students L2 (English) writing. The study analyses types of tenses errors that occurred in the aspect of the interference of L1 (Bahasa Melayu) into L2 (English)



writing. Therefore, this study provides useful information for future research in this area. This can help in coming up with more effective methods of teaching students so that such language errors can be avoided.

The study of the interference of L1 (Bahasa Melayu) in lower secondary students L2 (English) writing is significant for two main reasons. First, this study addresses the significance of the research by providing documents of written texts in relation to decoding of various types of tenses patterns. The lack of attention particularly to research on the changes of writing introduces a gap in SLA theories and application of methodology in the classroom. Very limited or little knowledge is highlighted about how educators and teachers are dealing with investigating and correcting the tenses due to inferences of first language (Bahasa Melayu).



This study also helps to investigate the sentence patterns due to interference of L1 (Bahasa Melayu) with relevance to SLA theories. It is hoped that comparing the similarities and dissimilarities tenses of both Bahasa Melayu and English language investigated in this study and those reported in previous research might provide better insights into the understanding of the conceptualization of theories and error analysis approach.

In other words, this study is significant by contributing to knowledge pertaining to the interference of L1 tenses in the writing of L2 and identifying tenses have been transferred negatively and positively from L1 to L2. Such understanding is helpful to both researchers and classroom practitioners especially in the context of learning English language as a second language. Although the findings cannot be generalized



and might not be applicable to all those concerns but the conclusion may be relevant and could be used as a paradigmatic reference on issues related to language teaching and practices especially in the context of learning English language as a second language.

The ministry of education is expected to be able to evaluate many of its current English language programmes and policies in order to implement more writing tasks. This study clearly provides significance to teachers, who should be aware of and take into consideration the findings and perceptions accessible from this study. In addition, the head of these schools should investigate various instructional and structural ways to promote English-language writing and discourage the use of the students' first language in translation. The government may be willing to investigate new ways to employ, teach, and support school. Besides it shall also benefit future researchers by becoming reference for future research.

1.6 Operational Definitions

1.6.1 First language

According to Safitri (2020) that learning a first language is something every child does successfully, in a matter of a few years and without the need for formal lessons. The process of language acquisition is done naturally since an infant is exposed to the language (Safitri, 2020). In the context of this study first language which is also known as L1 is Bahasa Melayu.



1.6.2. Second language

In this study English language is the second language. In Malaysia, English is accepted as the second language and is widely used as a medium of instruction in both formal and informal settings (Hashim, Haida & Yunus, Melor, 2018).

1.6.3 Tenses

Tense is related to time, and time refers to 'when' an action takes place. It '...expresses the time that an action occurs in relation to the moment of speaking' (Cowan, 2008, p. 350). Salaberry & Shirai (2002, p. 2) posit 'tense is a deictic category that places a situation in time with respect to some other time, usually moment of speech'. Tense has three 'dimensions': 'present', 'past', and 'future' (Cowan, 2008, p.350). This study focuses on the present tense, past tense and future tense.

1.6.4 Contrastive Error Analysis

According to Zaki (2015) that contrastive analysis begins with a comparison of the two languages' grammatical structures and only foresees the areas where the student of a second language will struggle or make errors. In this study the researcher is comparing between Bahasa Melayu and English language.



1.6.5 Error analysis

Error analysis begins with errors made while learning a second language and examines them in the context of their sources and importance (Zaki, 2015). In this study, the researcher examined student essays to identify the errors that the students had made in their proficiency with the English language.

1.6.6 Code-switching

Treffers-Daller, Ruigendijk and Hofweber (2021) stated that one of the unique characteristics of bilinguals is that they can freely switch between languages, both between and within utterances, a phenomenon that is generally described as code-switching (CS). In this study, refers to the use of two languages within a sentence or discourse. It is a natural process that often occurs between multilingual speakers who share two or more languages in common.

1.6.7 Language Interference

Tomoschuk et.al (2021) stated that applied linguistic work claims that multilinguals' non-native languages interfere with one another based on similarities in cognitive factors like proficiency or age of acquisition. In this study the focus would be on interference of L1 (Bahasa Melayu) in L2 (English) writing.



1.6.8 Language Influence

In this study the focus would be on influence of L1 (Bahasa Melayu) in L2 (English) writing. The first language (L1) of a learner might have an influence over foreign language learning, either by acting as a source for the learner to understand how the language works when the first language and the foreign language are similar (transfer), or by being a factor of interference if the two languages are very different (negative transfer) (Celaya, 2016).

1.6.9 Transfer

In general, cross-linguistic transfer can be defined as “language learners’ use of linguistic knowledge of one of their languages to leverage the learning of another language” (Yang et al., 2017). In this study the notion is to identify tenses have been transferred negatively and positively from L1 to L2 and to analyses the reasons of tenses transfer from L1 to L2.

1.6.10 Positive transfer

Positive Transfer is defined as the use of the rules that coincide in both L1 and L2 and the learners using the L1 rules to benefit from the learning of L2 (Nunan, 2000). In this study, the tenses are investigated to identify whether they are due to transfer positively from one language to another.



1.6.11 Negative transfer

In negative transfer the first language has negative impacts on L2 and interferes in L1. As Odlin (1989) points out when negative transfer occurs, we can study learners with different native language and compare them to find out the effect of L1 in learning a second language.). In this study, the tenses are investigated to identify whether they are due to transfer negatively from one language to another.

1.6.12 Writing

Peter & Singaravelu (2021) mentioned today's corporate world requires candidates who can write and communicate effectively in English. E-mails, Fax, Online Chat, Website updates require an excellent proficiency in English writing to communicate our need and demand effectively. The cross-linguistic transfer can occur in many terms or skills in learning the language such as speaking, listening, reading and writing. Malaysian people tend to write in English using the grammar rules of Malay Language. In this study the narrative and descriptive essays types are the focus. The essay titles are 'My family', 'My holidays', and 'If I were a millionaire'.

1.7 Summary

The background regarding the role of English language in Malaysian context as a second language and the extent of interference in the examined writing component of



the English language syllabus in a secondary school has been presented. The rationale for this study is to help the researcher to identify the interference of L1 tenses in the writing of L2 with specific reference to the interference of Bahasa Melayu (L1) in English (L2) and identify tenses which have been transferred negatively and positively from L1 to L2. This study also helps the researcher to analyse the reasons of tenses transfer from L1 to L2 and by the theoretical background of second language acquisition and interlanguage aspects of tenses with the mention of the related research studies conducted on second language learning and acquisition. The next chapter will explain the theoretical background of second language acquisition and interlanguage aspects of tenses with related research studies conducted on second language learning and acquisition.

