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THE USE OF PUPILS' L1 IN TEACHING ENGLISH VOCABULARY

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ABSTRACT

Pupils who had undergone four years of primary education were found to lack vocabulary knowledge in learning English. Thus, this study aimed to examine the views of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers and pupils on the use of pupils' first language (L1) in the teaching of English language vocabulary. It also investigated the teaching practices in particular the strategies employed by an ESL teacher to teach vocabulary using the pupils' L1. The participants were an ESL teacher and 24 Year Five pupils in a rural school in Perak. The sample consists of 9 boys and 15 girls who were all Malays. In addition, 30 ESL teachers in Perak answered a set of questionnaire. This study employed a combination of descriptive case study and survey method whereby the study comprised of classroom observations, interviews with teacher and selected pupils and questionnaire administered to pupils observed, and questionnaire administered to ESL teachers. The data from the classroom observations and interviews were transcribed and analysed qualitatively while the data from the questionnaire administered were analysed using descriptive categories. The findings provided an understanding of the views of the teachers and pupils in teaching English vocabulary using the pupils' L1. The findings also provided insights of the teacher's strategies in teaching vocabulary using the pupils' L1. Finally, the teaching of vocabulary is essential in determining the success of pupils in mastering the language skills.





Tajuk: Penggunaan Bahasa Ibunda Murid dalam Pengajaran Perbendaharaan Kata Bahasa Inggeris

ABSTRAK

Murid-murid yang telah menjalani empat tahun pendidikan sekolah rendah didapati kekurangan pengetahuan perbendaharaan kata dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pandangan guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris dan murid-murid dalam pengajaran perbendaharaan kata Bahasa Inggeris yang menggunakan bahasa ibunda murid. Ia juga mengkaji amalan pengajaran khususnya strategi yang digunakan oleh seorang guru Bahasa Inggeris untuk mengajar perbendaharaan kata yang menggunakan bahasa ibunda murid. Para peserta kajian terdiri daripada seorang guru Bahasa Inggeris dan 24 murid Tahun Lima di sebuah sekolah luar bandar di Perak. Murid-murid ini terdiri daripada 9 lelaki dan 15 perempuan yang kesemuanya berbangsa Melayu. Di samping itu, 30 guru Bahasa Inggeris di sekitar negeri Perak menjawab satu set soal selidik. Kajian ini ialah gabungan kajian kes deskriptif dan kaedah tinjauan yang terdiri daripada pemerhatian bilik darjah, temu bual dengan guru dan murid-murid terpilih dan soal selidik yang ditadbirkan kepada murid-murid, dan soal selidik yang diberikan kepada guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris. Data dari pemerhatian bilik darjah dan temu bual telah ditranskripsikan dan dianalisis secara kualitatif manakala data daripada soal selidik dianalisis menggunakan kategori deskriptif. Hasil kajian memberikan pemahaman mengenai pandangan guru-guru dan murid-murid dalam pengajaran perbendaharaan kata Bahasa Inggeris menggunakan bahasa ibunda murid. Ia juga memberi gambaran tentang strategi yang digunakan guru dalam pengajaran perbendaharaan kata menggunakan bahasa ibunda murid. Akhirnya, pengajaran perbendaharaan kata penting untuk menentukan kejayaan murid dalam menguasai kemahiran bahasa.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

L2	Second language
UPSR	Primary School Evaluation Test
ESL	English as a Second Language
L1	First Language
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
SLA	Second Language Acquisition



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION



1.0 Introduction

English is a compulsory subject in the primary school curriculum although it is a second language (L2) in Malaysia (*Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia*, 2001). Pupils in the primary school undergo six years of education and have to sit for a public examination, the Primary School Evaluation Test (UPSR), when they are in Year Six. Primary schools are divided into national and national-type schools. The national language, Bahasa Malaysia, is compulsory in all schools and is the medium of instruction in national schools whereas Chinese or Tamil is used as the medium of instruction in national-type schools. Hence, the curriculum gears pupils in Malaysia to be either bilingual or multilingual irrespective of the type of education received.





According to Parilah and Fauziah (2007) to be bilingual in Malaysia means pupils are able to use Bahasa Malaysia as well as English orally and in written form.

The aim of the English language syllabus for primary school is to provide opportunity for pupils to communicate effectively verbally and in writing in everyday life and in work situations as well as to prepare pupils for higher education. However, based on the 2010 UPSR results, it was found that 26.17 percent pupils failed to achieve Grade 'C' which is the minimum passing grade for the English language paper (*Blog Rasmi Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia*, 2011). This percentage represents a total of 126,126 pupils out of the 482,004 pupils who sat for the paper nationwide. Therefore, it seems that after six years of formal education, more than a quarter of the pupils who sat for the UPSR did not achieve the minimum level of



Teaching English language is a challenging task especially when dealing with children who are not proficient in the language. Lugo-Neris, Jackson and Goldstein (2010) state that the majority of ESL pupils have limited vocabulary knowledge which hinders understanding when reading in English. The lack of vocabulary is a barrier in expressing ideas both in oral and written forms. Various studies also confirm that academic failure or success is related to the amount of vocabulary knowledge gained (Baumann, Edwards, Font, Kame'enui & Olejnik, 2002; Baumann & Kame'enui (Eds.), 2004; Bensoussan, 1992; Biemiller & Boote, 2006; Laufer, 1992). Thus, a factor that contributes to the academic failure of pupils in the English language performance is the lack of vocabulary.





The ESL primary school teacher has to teach pupils new words and encourage active usage of words so that other language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing are developed. Rankin (1990) posits that vocabulary improvement happens for most people with direct instruction and practice. “Practice” means seeing the word, saying the word, associating it with at least three meaningful examples and creating with words (Rankin, 1990). Meanwhile, according to Nation (2001), when learning vocabulary in another language, a knowledge of 2,000 high-frequency words in English is important and should be given the highest priority and should be taught via direct teaching, direct learning and incidental learning. With an established knowledge of words, pupils will have a rich understanding and a good grasp of word meaning and nuances. Hence, one of the most crucial roles of the language teacher is to help pupils to develop a wide range of vocabulary.



According to Naginder, Nor Hayati and Muhammad Kamarul (2008) vocabulary refers to the semantics of the language and vocabulary knowledge refers to the ability to comprehend, acquire, retrieve and recall words with relative success. Vocabulary knowledge is seen to occupy a key position in learning a second language and therefore is the foundation of language learning. Read (2000) asserts that words are the basic building blocks of language, the units of meaning from which larger structures such as sentences, paragraphs and whole texts are formed. Thus, vocabulary is essential in helping pupils to master a language.

Coady (1997) coined the phrase ‘beginner’s paradox’ in reference to the problem that language learners face due to inadequate word knowledge. This applies to the Malaysian pupils who are weak in English and who do not have the means to





secure an adequate amount of vocabulary through extensive reading due to the inability to understand words that appear in the reading texts. Thus, out of frustration, the texts are often put aside and the students will not develop vocabulary knowledge. However, according to Nagy (2005) vocabulary knowledge is cumulative: the more words that are known, the easier it is to learn more words. Keeping pupils actively engaged in various vocabulary instructions can provide pupils with a sense of confidence to begin to manipulate, research, and use words more in speaking and writing vocabulary. Hence, direct instruction in word meaning can be effective and provide significant differences in the overall vocabulary of a pupil and is critical for pupils who do not read extensively due to limited vocabulary knowledge (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002).



with the students' native language or mother tongue or first language (L1) can be very effective when learning the basic vocabulary of a new language as there is an attempt to make some sort of meaning bridge between the target word and its L1 translation. Furthermore, Zhou Jin (2003) postulates that one of the most salient issues in the Western educational studies in the recent decades is bilingual education, which subscribes to the belief that the L1 of learners can be used to facilitate the teaching of the L2. Brown (2001) asserts that the native language of every learner is an extremely significant factor in the acquisition of a new language. This claim is supported by Nation (2003) who maintains that the L1 provides a familiar and effective way of quickly getting to grip with the meaning and content of what needs to be used in the L2. Asogar (2003) states that having a limited vocabulary is a barrier that prevents students from learning a foreign language. Therefore, direct instruction of vocabulary





or active vocabulary learning is very important but often neglected in the second language classrooms. This is especially true for pupils with low proficiency of the language.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Pupils are tested in all skills of the English language which require comprehension and to respond and write answers in the language. It is impossible if the pupils have a limited vocabulary of the English language. Pupils will also have problems in understanding the questions in examinations without the ability to recognise and relate words to appropriate objects or concepts (Sapiah Mat Layis, 2002). According to Liu (2008), during the L2 vocabulary teaching process, the proper application of L1 can effectively facilitate the memorisation of new words. Hence, pupils will be able to increase their L2 vocabulary and gradually increase proficiency. This situation prompts the researcher to find out how the L1 of pupils is used in the English classroom to teach vocabulary to pupils of low proficiency level.

The reading comprehension problem pupils face stems from the lack of understanding of words, particularly content words in a reading text as “vocabulary has been linked to the ability to understand written text” (Protopapas, Mouzaki, Sideridis, Kotsolakou, & Simos, 2013, p.169). The problem is that the pupils do not understand the words in English when the teacher explains the word in English and referring to the English-English dictionary will also cause confusion in particular when there are two or more meanings of a word. Therefore, many pupils use the





English-Malay bilingual dictionary to look up for meanings of words that are not understood and also words encountered for the first time. However, using the bilingual dictionary is time consuming for the low proficiency pupils due to difficulty in locating the target word. Another problem that arises from the use of the bilingual dictionary is that the pupils left personally to look up for meanings of words will not be able to understand the concept because certain words have more than one meaning. The researcher's discussion with her supervisor based on her teaching experience provides an example of this situation. The following are two sentences constructed by a student: *1. When you reach the junction, turn right. 2. Then, turn wrong and you will see the cinema.* In this example, the student used the word "wrong" in the second sentence due to the understanding that the word "right" means "correct" and as a result, the opposite of right is wrong. The student had failed to understand that the word "right" is used to give directions and the opposite of it is "left". According to Hunt (2009), more "meaning-focused input" which are the use of exercises or follow-up activities such as comparing both L1 and L2 knowledge and contexts should be provided so that learners will develop their bilingual dictionary use skills instead of relying on "simplistic translations" (p. 15).

According to Liu (2008), when children learn new words in their L1, both words and concepts are learnt simultaneously. Hence, word form and meanings are often inseparable. Liu further explains that when children see a word in their L1, its meaning becomes available automatically and when people speak in their L1, the retrieval of lexical forms is usually spontaneous and effortless. To illustrate, when explaining the word "poison", the teacher could say "something you consume that can kill you" or use the word "venom" or "toxin" to explain the word. However, pupils





fail to understand these explanations which do not exist in their L2 vocabulary. On the contrary, the pupils will understand the meaning of the word if the L1 word “*racun*” is used. This translation equivalence enables a L2 learner to map the word directly onto the L1 (Liu, 2008). Christen and Murphy (as cited in Assia Benettayeb, 2010) also contend that research clearly emphasises that for learning to occur, new information must be integrated with what the learner already knows. Consequently, L1 may facilitate classroom activities, particularly for low proficiency students and complex tasks (Soulignavong Latsanyphone & Souvannasy Bouangeune, 2009). Moreover, Cárdenas-Hagan, Carlson and Pollard-Durodola (2007) assert that “low levels of L1 vocabulary and conceptual knowledge have a limiting effect on the development of L2” (p. 250). They further explain that when young learners are introduced to reading in L2, the task would become more difficult because the learners cannot relate L2 linguistic and emergent literacy knowledge to their first language. Hence, the existing L1 knowledge of a learner is significant in the acquisition of L2 skills.

Most importantly, a preliminary study carried out with an intact Year Five class which comprised of 25 pupils in a rural area in Perak revealed that the pupils scored an average of 19.33% for a list of 100 words taken from the Year Four word list provided. Hence, it can be concluded that this achievement is very low as the pupils studied the Year Four English language lessons which should teach the words listed. This prompted the researcher to undertake the study to examine how the L1 of the pupils is utilised to help the pupils overcome the lack of word knowledge which is essential in learning a second language.





Based on the situations provided, it is best that the pupils are supervised and guided by the teacher when using L1 to understand L2 words. According to Ali Jahangard, Ahmad Moinsadeh and Mansoor Tavakoli (2010), given the omnipresent nature of L1 influence, it seems perfectly logical to make the most use of L1 when it is an evident advantage in creating the early form-meaning link. Therefore, it is crucial that the role of the L1 of the pupils in teaching the L2 vocabulary be examined carefully.

Based on the discussions above, it is pertinent to investigate the use of L1 in the ESL classroom to provide better understanding and useful information specifically on how ESL teachers and pupils perceive the use of pupils' L1 in teaching vocabulary. Hence, the present study examined how L1 is used to teach English



1.2 Rationale of the study

Words are the fundamental units of language. Without sufficient vocabulary, one cannot communicate effectively or express ideas. Nation and Newton (1997) emphasise that the 2,000 high-frequency words of English should receive attention first because without these it is not possible to use English in any normal way. In addition, Nation (2001) asserts that the high-frequency words of a language are very important and considerable time should be spent on the words by teachers and learners which are considered as time well-spent. Moreover, according to Nunan (1991) the initial stages of second language learning should be devoted almost





entirely to vocabulary work. Hence, successful techniques to enable pupils to learn new vocabulary need to be employed so that words are easier to remember and pupils will become more motivated in class.

The issue of using the L1 of the pupils to aid learning has been discussed by numerous researchers who have conducted studies on the effects of using L1 in the L2 classroom. Lai (1996), Schweers (1999) and Tang (2002) assert that the use of English only in the classroom would often lead to frustration since the input is incomprehensible to students. This opinion has been echoed by Ellis (1994), Cook (2001), Richards and Rodgers (2001) and Widdowson (2003), second language teaching and learning researchers who claim that, although exposure to the target language can ensure success, the exposure may not work in every classroom. Thus, it is relevant to consider the use of the L1 of the pupils in the vocabulary instruction.

However, according to Hunt and Beglar (1998) the proficiency level of learners and learning situation should be considered when deciding the approach in vocabulary instruction. The writers emphasise that explicit instruction is best for beginning and intermediate students who have limited vocabularies.

As an educator who has taught in all levels of education namely the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, the researcher realised the potential in utilising L1 to aid the learning of English language vocabulary specifically among the ESL primary school pupils. Based on the experience of the researcher, pupils tended to give up efforts to become proficient users of English with age. Besides that, the pupils do not receive any form of remedial intervention unlike the effort taken by the Ministry of Education in providing the remedial classes for pupils who have not mastered the





reading, writing and arithmetic skills in the Bahasa Malaysia (*Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia*, 2012). Thus, it is crucial that the pupils obtain help in the early years of education rather than wait until secondary schools and higher learning institutions.

The policy of the Ministry of Education Malaysia regarding the use of the pupils' L1 in the teaching and learning of English language (L2) is not stated directly in the English language syllabus document for primary schools but it is stated that:

“Learners differ from each other in their individual strengths, abilities and learning styles and preferences. In teaching the curriculum, these differences are taken into account so that the aims and aspirations of the curriculum are fulfilled and the potential of the child is maximised” (*Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia*, 2001, p. 1)

Therefore, even though the use of pupils' L1 is not stated directly in the syllabus, the pupils' differences especially their levels of proficiency, learning styles and preferences should be considered in the planning and teaching of language skills which include vocabulary acquisition and knowledge. Sharimllah Devi and Hajar (2004) assert that “falling back on one's L1 is a learning strategy” (p. 163) and as such the use of pupils' L1 in teaching L2 vocabulary is a strategy that could help pupils learn vocabulary more effectively. Subsequently, utilising the L1 of the pupils in the process of learning vocabulary is important as pupils who are not proficient in L2 will find it easier and more confident to use the L1 in understanding and thus acquire adequate vocabulary to further master the other skills of the L2. This is in line with the idea posited by Cook (2001) that using the L1 to convey meaning may be efficient, help learning and make pupils feel natural in the classroom. If action is not taken by teachers to address the problem faced by the ESL pupils in learning adequate words, then the pupils will become stagnant in the learning of the L2. Based on this





importance, it is definitely a priority to investigate the use of L1 in the L2 vocabulary learning of the pupil. The purpose of utilising the L1 of the pupil is not to use the L1 as the main medium to teach English lessons but to support vocabulary learning.

Besides that, studies on the use of L1 in gaining vocabulary knowledge have focused mostly on learning and teaching strategies, attitudes or perceptions on the use of L1 and also the comparisons of certain methods in helping students acquire vocabulary knowledge (Goh, Leela Chakrabarty, Sasikala Nallaya & Seva Bala Sundaram, 2008; Haifa Al-Nofaie, 2010; Kavaliauskienė, 2009). There are also very few studies which examine the effects of L1 in the learning of L2 especially among young ESL pupils in Malaysia. Most studies conducted on the learning of vocabulary utilising L1 involved students in the secondary schools and institutions of higher learning (Goh et al., 2008; Goh & Fatimah Hashim, 2006; Liu, 2008; Nur Syafenah Haji Shafee, 2004; Shanti Nadarajan, 2009; Sharimllah Devi Ramachandran & Hajar Abdul Rahim, 2004; Siti Hamin Stapa & Abdul Hamid Abdul Majid, 2006). Thus, it is of importance that the use of L1 in teaching vocabulary to pupils in the primary education level is investigated to provide understanding of the process involved. In addition, pupils in the primary school level need early intervention through the use of the L1 to ensure mastery of the L2 to perform well academically. As educators who are concerned with the problem of the inability of pupils to master the English skills, it is certainly a priority to investigate the possibility of using L1 in helping the ESL pupils to master the English language.





1.3 Purpose of the Study

The focus of the present study was on the teaching of vocabulary in ESL classroom using the L1 of pupils. It focused on the process of acquiring the L2 vocabulary using L1 and not the product or outcome of the use of L1 in the teaching of L2 words. Hence, the study examined the approach of the teacher in teaching vocabulary and the approach of pupils in learning vocabulary that utilised the L1 of pupils.

Based on the discussion above, the study focused on achieving the following aims:

1. To examine the views of English language teachers regarding the teaching of English vocabulary using the L1 of the pupils.
2. To examine the views of pupils regarding the teaching of English vocabulary using the L1 of the pupils.
3. To investigate the practices of the ESL teacher in the teaching of English language vocabulary using the L1 of the pupils.

1.4 Research Questions

This study was designed to answer the following research questions:

- Q1. What are the perceptions of ESL teachers on the use of the L1 in the teaching of ESL vocabulary?



- Q2. What are the perceptions of ESL pupils on the use of the L1 in the teaching of ESL vocabulary?
- Q3. How does an ESL teacher teach the English language vocabulary using the L1 of the pupils?

Table 1.1 illustrates the theories and data collection tools that were used in the process of obtaining the necessary data to answer the three research questions. Two areas of interest were investigated in relation to the teaching of vocabulary using the L1 of the pupils, which were the teacher's practices and the views of teachers and pupils regarding vocabulary teaching using the L1 of the pupils. The first and second research questions aimed to provide a platform to understand the views of English language teachers and pupils respectively regarding the teaching of vocabulary in particular when the L1 of the pupils was used in the process of providing comprehensible input to the ESL pupils.

Table 1.1
Summary of Methodology

Research Questions	Theories	Data Collection	Data Analysis
1. What are the perceptions of ESL teachers on the use of the L1 in teaching ESL vocabulary?		- Questionnaire	
2. What are the perceptions of ESL pupils on the use of the L1 in teaching ESL vocabulary?	- Information Processing Theory - Schema Theory	- Questionnaire - Interviews	- Descriptive analysis - Qualitative analysis of responses
3. How does an ESL teacher teach the English language vocabulary using the L1 of the pupils?	- Constructivism Theory	- Classroom observations (audio and video recordings) - Field notes - Interviews	



The third research question investigated the types of teacher's strategies using the pupils' L1 in assisting ESL pupils learn the English language vocabulary.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

In this study, the teaching of vocabulary via direct instruction which utilised the L1 of the pupils was examined. The process of teaching the meanings of words was recorded and the teacher was interviewed about the teaching process after the lessons. The intact class of pupils observed also answered a questionnaire and unstructured interviews were carried out with pupils during the classroom observations. These unstructured interviews were carried out with individual pupils when they were given time to complete the written work in class. The interviews were also carried out with groups of pupils when they were doing group activities in groups of three to five. Then, English language teachers from primary schools in Tanjong Malim were selected to answer the questionnaire on the use of the L1 of the pupils in the teaching of vocabulary to obtain the views of the teachers regarding the teaching of English vocabulary using the L1 of the pupils.

The conceptual framework of this study provided the concepts and basic assumptions in guiding the researcher to gather and interpret data. Most importantly, the framework enabled the researcher to refine concepts, evaluate assumptions of the model and answer the research questions posited. Thus, this section provides an overview of the cognitive theory which formed the foundation of this study. According to McLaughlin (1987), learning a second language is the acquisition of a





complex cognitive skill. The Information Processing Theory advocated by McLaughlin emphasises that to learn a second language is to learn a skill because various aspects of the task must be practised and integrated into fluent performance which requires the automatisisation of component sub-skills. Thus learning involves internal representations that regulate and guide performance. As performance improves, there is constant restructuring as learners simplify, unify and gain increasing control over the internal representations.

Mitchell and Myles (1998) further explain that learning a second language involves the activation of a selection of information nodes in the memory. Through repeated activation, sequences first produced by controlled processing become automatic. Automatised sequences are stored as units in the long-term memory which are available whenever needed. These automatic processes work in parallel, activating clusters of complex cognitive skills simultaneously. The incremental nature of learning occurs when simple sub skills and routines become automatic before more complex skills are tackled. The continuing movement from controlled to automatic processing results in the restructuring of the linguistic system of the L2 learners.

In the case of learning L2 vocabulary, the relevance of the automatic dichotomy of the Information Processing Theory focuses on the strength of association between a word and its meaning. According to Dornic (1979) as cited in McLaughlin (1987) the semantic content of words are decoded more slowly in the L2 and also the ability of learners to encode information in the L2 is inferior to performance in the L1. McLaughlin and Heredia (1996) summarise that information processing is the use of an L2 as a cognitive skill which involves the internalisation,





through practice of various information-handling techniques to overcome capacity limitations. Skill acquisition involves the accumulation of automatic processing through initial controlled operations. Then the internalised rules are restructured as learners adjust their internal representations to match the target language.

Another theory that is relevant to the present study is the Schema Theory proposed by Anderson (1977). The principle of the Schema Theory that relates to the teaching of vocabulary is that teachers need to help pupils build schemata or remind pupils of what is already known to comprehend new information. The mental representations used during perception and comprehension, and which evolve as a result of these processes, combine to form a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts. According to Meyer (2008), the use of the L1 of the pupils is possibly the best way to make new material related to the structure of the knowledge of learners, especially students of low proficiency. Thus, schema plays an important role in facilitating the ability of students to comprehend new words learnt using the L1. This is because L2 learners already have an extensive base of schemata that have been developed in the L1. For example, schema is important in the pre reading stage of a reading lesson.



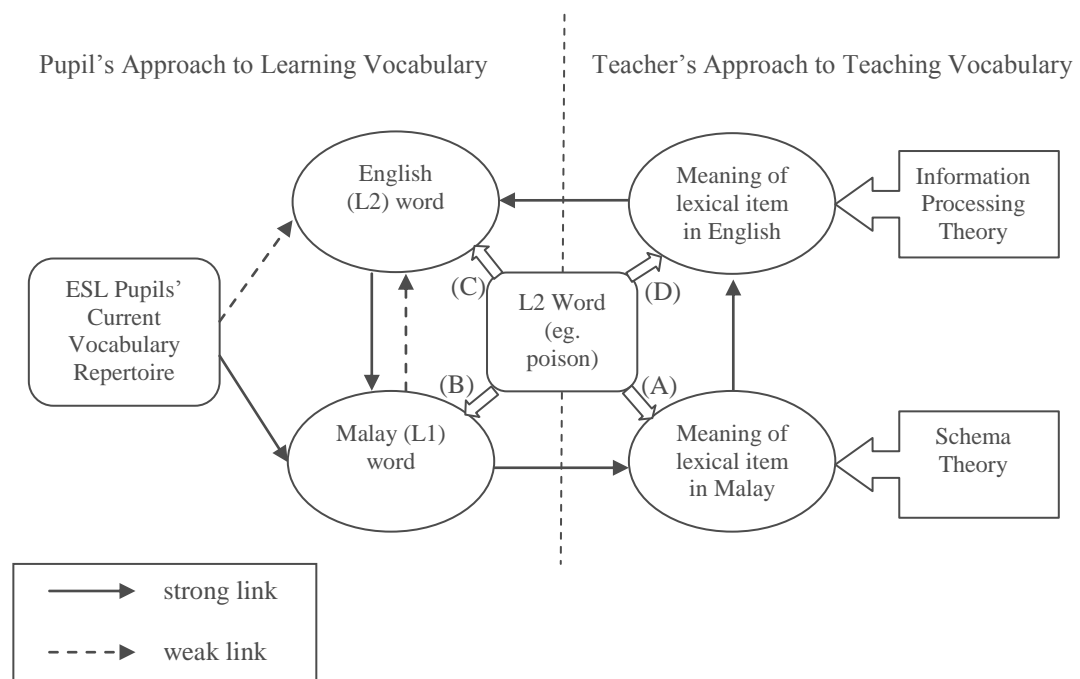


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

In relation to this study, the practices of the teacher in assisting ESL pupils learn the English language vocabulary using L1 are examined to provide understanding of the mental processes undergone by pupils. Thus, the L2 mental processes adapted from the Kroll and Stewart's Revised Hierarchical Model (1994) form the conceptual framework of this study (Figure 1.1). In this framework, the ESL pupils possess a repertoire of vocabulary both in L1 and L2. The pupils with low proficiency have a repertoire of L1 vocabulary which is more extensive than the repertoire of L2 vocabulary. This is shown in the theoretical framework where the pupils have a strong link to the L1 vocabulary repertoire whereas the link to the L2 vocabulary repertoire is weak. Understanding this phenomenon, the teacher could utilise this advantage of the pupils' schemata to explain the meanings of L2 words using the L1 of the pupils. As a result, the teacher could form an approach or carry out a specific strategy in teaching vocabulary to the ESL pupils.



Within this framework, the researcher believes that ESL pupils possess a current vocabulary repertoire where the meanings of words in both L1 and L2 are stored. For example, when a new English language (L2) word is encountered in a reading lesson, the teacher could use the Bahasa Malaysia (L1) to explain the meaning of the L2 word (A). The teacher is aware that the pupils could understand the meaning provided in Malay as the first language. At this point, Schema Theory could be applicable as the pupils could use the background knowledge of Malay (L1) to understand the meaning of the L2 word (B). Consequently, through practice and repeated exposure, the pupil would be able to understand the meaning of the word in English (C). Eventually, the pupils would gradually develop the ability to explain the meaning of the L2 word in English as described by the Information Processing Theory (D). To illustrate, when the teacher explained for instance the meaning of the word “poison” using L1, she would say “*racun*”. The pupils would understand the meaning of “*racun*” as the word is already part of the pupils’ schema as they had learnt the word in the L1. The repeated exposure to the meaning of the word in L2 would enable the pupils to be able to trigger the words associated with it. Thus, the pupils would acquire the ability to explain the words using L2. This is achieved through repeated exposure of the word in both L1 and L2 which involves the internal processing of the mental lexicon of the pupils.





1.6 Operational Definition of Terms

The following are definitions of the important terms used in this study.

1.6.1 Teacher's practices

For the purpose of this study, the teacher's practices refer to the instructional strategies using L1 in teaching words in the English language lessons.

1.6.2 L1 of the pupils

For the purpose of this study, Malay pupils were chosen and therefore the L1 of the pupils is Bahasa Malaysia. The L1 of the pupils is also referred to as the first language or mother tongue of the pupils which means, "*the stronger language at any time of life*" (Phillipson, 1989 cited in Kecskes & Papp, 2000, p. 1).

1.6.3 English as a Second Language (ESL) pupils

ESL pupils in this research refers to Malay pupils whose first language is Malay and hence, accordingly, they are assumed to think in the Bahasa Malaysia (Abdul Halim, 2009, p. 43). Due to the setting of this study which is located in a rural area, learning English is similar to learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting. The pupils have limited use of the English language which is restricted to formal instruction during the English language lessons. The ESL pupils in this study are also pupils with limited English proficiency.





1.6.4 Pupils

Pupils in this study refer to Year Five primary school pupils. However, this word is also used to refer to all the children schooling in primary schools in Malaysia from Year One to Year Six.

1.6.5 Students

For the purpose of this study, students refer to learners in secondary schools and institutions of higher learning.

1.6.6 The teaching of vocabulary using the L1 of the pupils



The teaching of vocabulary using the L1 of the pupils refers to the use of Bahasa Malaysia (the L1 of the pupils) by the English teacher to explain the meanings of words regardless of whether the words are grammar items or words from any other categories.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to the observation of subjects who are Malay pupils. The pupils do not use English language at home and have no access to reading materials in English. Their level of achievement in English is low. This study focused on second





language learners and therefore cannot be applied to other types of learners, but only to the class of pupils observed in this study.

The location chosen to conduct this study was a grade 'B' rural school in Perak. There are no modern facilities such as the Internet, computers and references that would benefit pupils in looking up meaning of words on their own. The pupils are also from the low income group. They do not have the advantage of having monolingual or bilingual dictionaries and also e-dictionaries which might be able to aid the understanding of words. For these reasons, the findings of this study could not be applied to other types of school locations and settings.



1.8 Significance of the Study



The findings from this study would provide information and knowledge for educators with the option of using L1 in aiding English language vocabulary knowledge of pupils especially to provide an avenue to help ESL pupils in understanding the L2 words encountered during their English lessons. The findings could also provide a better understanding of how pupils could accumulate word knowledge and the potential effects of using L1 in the teaching and learning process specifically to ESL pupils. Thus, in general, educators would be able to plan teaching and learning strategies according to the needs of the pupils.

Besides that, this study would shed light on the views provided by Year Five primary school pupils regarding the use of their L1 in learning English vocabulary





such as their vocabulary learning styles and preferences. This is pertinent as the voices of pupils especially in the primary school level are unheard of in previous researches as most studies focus on perceptions and views of older students such as students in secondary schools and institutions of higher learning (Goh et al., 2008; Goh & Fatimah Hashim, 2006; Liu, 2008; Nur Syafenah Haji Shafee, 2004; Shanti Nadarajan, 2009; Sharimllah Devi Ramachandran & Hajar Abdul Rahim, 2004; Siti Hamin Stapa & Abdul Hamid Abdul Majid, 2006).

Finally, the present study aims to investigate the strategies of an ESL teacher in the teaching of English vocabulary. Thus, through the classroom observations and interviews carried out, the strategies using pupils' L1 employed by the teacher in teaching English vocabulary could be determined. The teaching strategies are determined through the classroom interaction between the teacher and her pupils as well as teaching episodes that would provide meaningful information regarding the use of the pupils' L1 in teaching vocabulary. Goa and Ma (2011) suggest that "language teachers need to diversify their pedagogical activities in helping empower their students with better capacity and knowledge for the vocabulary learning task" (p. 340.) Therefore, the information obtained from the strategies used by the teacher would help other ESL teachers to understand and further improve their own vocabulary teaching approaches in particular with the use of pupils' L1.





1.9 Summary

This chapter introduces the study and provides the justifications of the importance of the study in the statement of the problem, posits the research questions and the significance of the study.

