



THE INFLUENCE OF BAHASA MALAYSIA ON STUDENTS' WRITING WHILE LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN A NATIONAL PRIMARY SCHOOL

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL WORK

I, hereby declare that the work in this dissertation is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

Dated: 2 March 2008

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ABSTRAK

Penulisan dalam Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Kedua penuh dengan cabaran dari segi sosial dan kognitif. Kajian kes berbentuk kualitatif ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pengaruh Bahasa Malaysia sebagai bahasa ibunda pelajar Melayu terhadap bahasa Inggeris khususnya dalam penulisan. Pemboleh ubah bersandar ialah bilangan kesalahan yang dibuat oleh responden manakala pemboleh ubah tidak bersandar ialah ujian – ujian semasa aktiviti penulisan. 30 orang murid dipilih secara kelompok dari Tahun Lima sebuah sekolah luar bandar. Kaedah pemerhatian, soal selidik, temu ramah, koleksi latihan –latihan murid dan tiga peringkat aktiviti penulisan termasuk ujian-ujian pra dan pos telah digunakan untuk mengumpul data. Soalan kajian ‘Adakah Bahasa Malaysia sebagai bahasa pertama mempengaruhi penulisan bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua terjawab melalui aktiviti penulisan yang dijalankan. Hasil kajian mendapati Bahasa Malaysia memang mempengaruhi bahasa Inggeris tetapi ia dapat dikurangkan melalui latihan tubi dan penjelasan mengenai kesalahan yang dilakukan oleh responden. Kesimpulannya, latihan yang ketara dapat mengatasi masalah pengaruh bahasa pertama. Kesalahan dalam penulisan bahasa Inggeris berdasarkan pengaruh Bahasa Malaysia telah dikaji berdasarkan Corder’s (1974) Taxonomy of Error Analysis.

Kata kunci – bahasa pertama, bahasa kedua, pengaruh, kesalahan.





ABSTRACT

Students' writing in a second language encounters both social and cognitive challenges which are related to second language acquisition. This qualitative case study is meant to identify how L1 (Bahasa Malaysia) of the Malay students influence their L2 (English) writing. The dependent variable is the students' number of errors they did in the writing tests and the independent variable is the students' writing tests. 30 students of Year Five from a rural school were selected as a cluster sample from an intact class. Observations, questionnaire, interviews, collection of students' written exercises and three stages of writing activities inclusive of pretests and posttests were used to collect data. The research question 'Does Bahasa Malaysia, as L1 of the Malay students, influenced their L2 (English Language) writing skill?' is answered through the conduct of the writing tests. The result is, there is influence of L1 but with a number of exercises and explanations the errors were minimized. The errors of L1 interference were analyzed based on Corder's (1974) Taxonomy of Error Analysis.

Key words – L1, L2, influence, L1 interference, errors.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

L1	= First Language (mother tongue)
L2	= Second Language
PIPP	= Pelan Induk Pembangunan Pendidikan
UPSR	= Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah
S.K.	= Sekolah Kebangsaan
SLA	= Second Language Acquisition
UG	= Universal Grammar
TL	= Target Language
EFL	= English as Foreign Language
CAH	= Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis
SPSS	= Statistic Package of Social Science
SA	= Strongly Agree
BM	= Bahasa Malaysia
A	= Agree
U	= Undecided
D	= Disagree
SD	= Strongly Disagree
5P	= 5 Pintar
Λ	= Omission of article <i>the</i>
*	= grammatically wrong sentence





CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

We can say that writing is an “intricate” and complex task; it is the “most difficult of the language abilities to acquire” (Corder, 1974, p.177). Its level of difficulty varies between native speakers who think in the language used (in this case it will be English) and non-native speakers who think in their own native language (in this case it will be Bahasa Malaysia). While writing, non-native speakers have, in general, to think about all those rules they need to apply, rules that native speakers are supposed to have automatisized. Therefore, non-native speakers are more prone to making mistakes and / or committing errors. But we cannot avoid from learning English as it is a global language.

In Malaysia, even though English is taught in primary schools (Year One) and some have started in nursery, but it has been noted that generally Malaysian students’ proficiency in English Language is questionable. Recently it has become a national issue in Malaysia because the government has been emphasizing on the use and mastery of English Language. On top of that we have another 13 years to achieve Vision 2020 and the government is aware of the importance of English as international language in the





realization of the vision. The Ministry of Education has formulated its own vision for education through 'Pelan Induk Pembangunan Pendidikan (PIPP) from 2006 to 2010. It also stresses on using the English Language in the teaching of English, Mathematics and Science. In order to achieve a world-class status, we need to master the highest standard of English. The Ministry believes that Malaysia's progress towards full economic development requires mastery of English as an international language. Its efforts at globalization and its vision of becoming the centre of academic excellence have to be seen against a backdrop of high English Language competence. So, to achieve the Ministry's vision to make every student proficient in English, the challenge kicks off at the primary school level.

According to Mr Ibrahim B Abdul Ghafar and Puan Ernie Fazleen Bt Long Jaafar, both senior teacher of SK Sultan Abdullah, Changkat Jering, Perak, said, Bahasa Malaysia as the 'mother tongue' of the Malay pupils had influenced especially the students. The problem had affected the UPSR results for the past few years (Refer Appendix 1). Even though pupils were exposed to the English Language for more than six years, but the ability to construct grammatically correct sentences in English is very poor.

According to the senior English language teachers of SK Sultan Abdullah, the use of Bahasa Malaysia (L1) by Malay pupils during English lessons had affected the learning of English language among them. It had affected their pronunciation and writing skills too.

A general reason given by the senior English language teachers for the lower percentage in English Language of UPSR results could be because in this school, English





language is very minimal exposure and use of English language in and outside the classrooms. Since 100 % of the pupils are Malays, they use Bahasa Malaysia to communicate among them. English is only used during the English teaching and learning periods.

So, this study is meant to identify the L1 influence in writing English Language and find solutions to overcome it. There are three stages of writing activities to be carried out during the research to find out the area which the pupils' are facing problem particularly in writing.

1.2 Background to the Problem

As an English teacher, the researcher is well aware of the fact that the Bahasa Malaysia speaking pupils (especially Malays) in Year Five of Sekolah Kebangsaan Sultan Abdullah, Changkat Jering, Perak commit a lot of errors in constructing sentences. Although these pupils have been studying English for the past five years but their errors are numerous especially in writing skill.

Many studies were carried out on how L1 influence L2. In most of the cases, the L1 can be French, Spanish, Mandarin and many other languages. For instance, Stephen D.Krashen (1975), Rod Ellis (1985), Brown H D (1994), Cohen A (1976), and many other researchers have carried out studies on second language acquisition and also influence of mother tongue. But studies on how Bahasa Malaysia as L1 influences English Language as L2 is studied by very few researchers, to name a few Malaysians are Asmah Haji Omar, Maznah Ismail & Ng Wai Kong (1985). Recently Wong and Quek (2007) carried out study on use of definite article among Malay and Chinese students.



The result shows there is influence of L1. Many studies on the acquisition of a second language carried out in the 1970s and 1980s have shown consistent result on influence of L1 (VanPatten & Williams, 2007, p. 29)

1.2.1 Students' Background

This study was carried out in Sekolah Kebangsaan Sultan Abdullah, Kampung Cheh, Changkat Jering, Perak. It is one of the rural schools in Taiping. Four hundred and eighty (100 %) of the students in this school are Malays. The school is situated in a village called Kampong Cheh, which is 25 km away from Taiping town. It is surrounded by a few Malay villages (kampung). According to the pupils (through interviews) they seldom travel to the town unless if their parents have any necessary to go to the town. So the exposure to the outside world too is very minimal among the pupils. The chances for them to mix and speak other languages are very minimal. Moreover, in school too, they have very limited time of learning English in classrooms; 350 minutes per week, which is insufficient for one to learn a second language and to be excellent in it.

Table 1.1

Profile of participants

PARTICIPANTS

No. of Participants	Sex	Year	Age	The Use of English	Interest in English
30	11 Male 19 Female	Year 5 (2007)	+10	As an L2	Average

1.2.2 Parents' Backgrounds

Through a survey conducted by Pn Rubiah Bt Abdul Karim, the Senior Assistant of Pupils' Affair, of Sekolah Kebangsaan Sultan Abdullah, Kampung Cheh, for administration purposes, 70 % (280 parents out of 480) of the parents are uneducated. Most of them are working as farmers. The rest are working in factories and a few of them are working in government departments. According to Puan Rubiah, the parents' income is lower too (approximately between RM 350 to 600), except for the 30% of the parents who work as civil servants and in small business sectors. These make them hard to send their children for extra classes, especially for English.

1.2.3 Social Factors

Both social and cognitive factors affect language learning. Exploration of social factors gives us some idea of why learners differ in their rate of L2 learning. Since 100% of the villagers are Malays, the tendency to use mono language among the pupils is higher. There was no exposure to other languages except Malay. Even though, they have the mass media facilities, but the switch to listen to other languages than Bahasa Malaysia is very minimal. The students only use Bahasa Malaysia to communicate among themselves all the time.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are: Firstly to find out how Bahasa Malaysia (L1) influence

the Malay pupils' English in constructing sentences. Secondly, it would also find solutions to overcome the problem. This is an important problem that needs to be tackled because it involved 85 % (400 pupils) of the pupils in this school who are facing the same problem.

1.4 Problem Statement

The Bahasa Malaysia as the Malay pupils' L1 has influence on the English language writing particularly. It influenced the pupils' spelling, sentence structure and the use of indefinite article *the*. For instance, in spelling, they tend to use Bahasa Malaysia spelling such as *baisikal* (bicycle), *belon* (balloon) and etcetera (refer Appendix 16, 17 and 18). In sentence structure, *friend best* instead of *best friend* and *name mother* instead of *mother's name* to name a few. They also omit and overuse the article *the* while constructing sentences. The pupils also tend to use direct translation from Bahasa Malaysia to English language. The pupils are more comfortable with their L1 rather than the target language (Asmah Haji Omar, 1982, pp 25). Besides that, the attitude of the Malay pupils that English is a colonial language and it is not so important is also another problem for the English Language teachers to convince them to learn English. According to Maznah and Ng, (1985), the exposure to the target language in most of rural schools is very little. This worsens the problem of learning the second language. The ability to write well in English is not a naturally acquired skill; it is usually learned or culturally transmitted as a set of practices in formal instructional settings or other environments such as watching television (Krashen, 1981). Writing skills must be practiced and learned through more formal writing activities so that they can improve their proficiency in writing English



sentences. Exposure to the English speaking environment is very little to them with only seven (7) periods (350 minutes) of English per week. All the pupils tend to use Bahasa Malaysia which is deeply embedded in a Malay speaking environment as compared to English, which is usually used only during the English lessons. The students who have limited exposure to the English language need a lot of English Language exposure and motivation to learn the second language.

Most of the ESL pupils studying in the school where this study was carried out have the basic of English writing skills (Mr Mohamad Ibrahim, a senior English Language teacher of SKSA). They were taught how to make simple sentences since Year One, the foundation to make sentences had been taught but because the lack of English vocabulary and grammar they could not construct grammatically good and correct sentences. But knowing how to write a "good sentence" in Bahasa Malaysia does not necessarily mean that the students will be able to write well in English language too. 'Good sentences' here refers to writing grammatically correct sentences. Many of them use direct translation method to write in English Language.

1.5 Research Questions

On the basis of considerations of all the related areas and problems mentioned above, the present study addresses two research questions.

Does Bahasa Malaysia, as L1 of the Malay students, influence their L2 (English Language) writing skill?

If L1 influences L2, what are the solutions to overcome the problem?





1.6 Purposes of the study

Through the senior English teachers and the researcher's personal experience in teaching Malay students for the past 13 years, it was found that Bahasa Malaysia had a significant influence on their spelling, vocabulary and sentence structures. This problem needs to be identified and corrected during the early stage because the L1 influence does not stop, it continues until they go to secondary school. So, through this research, the researcher wishes to find the solutions to overcome the problems faced by the English Language teachers in this school.

This research is mainly aimed to study the Malay students' writing when learning English language. Secondly, it is also to study whether Bahasa Malaysia influenced the Malay pupils' English language writing. Thirdly, it is also to find solutions to overcome the pupils' problems of Bahasa Malaysia influence in constructing grammatically correct English sentences.

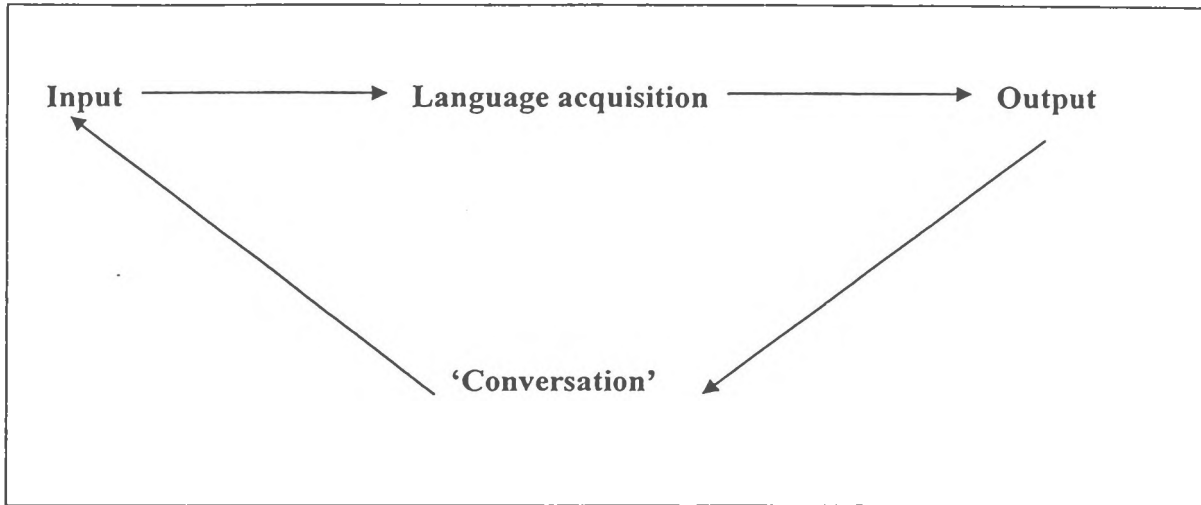
1.7 Krashen's Input Hypothesis

There are many theories and hypothesis about second language acquisition. But the most relevant theory for this study is **Input Hypothesis**. Input Hypothesis is defined as: **If the input is understood, and there is enough of it, the necessary grammar is automatically provided** (Krashen, 1985, p.2). Krashen emphasized that the **input** we give to the students is the most important and must be effective if we expect the students output to be excellent. Figure 1.1 shows Krashen's Input Hypothesis.



Figure 1.1

Krashen's Input Hypothesis



Krashen (1982, p.16) stated that second language learners can use conscious rules only when three conditions are met. (a) **Time**. In order to think about and use conscious rules effectively, a second language performer needs to have sufficient time. (b). **Focus on form**. The use of the input effectively, the learner must also be focused on form, or thinking about correctness. (c) **Know the rule**. Not everyone mastered the rules of the grammar. To be efficient in a second language one need to know the grammar rules well.

There is possibility of getting different findings although similar studies were conducted in different settings. The reason may attribute to the fact that Krashen and others mentioned in this study had collected data in settings where English was spoken as the first language and learned as the second language. They, then, generalized the results or findings to the EFL settings. However, the learners' exposure to the English Language in these two settings is very different. ESL learners have certainly a better opportunity and their exposure to English is far less then the former group. Thus, it is not appropriate

to overgeneralize the results of the studies carried out in ESL context to EFL context. Even though this study was in a ESL country, but the actual setting of the school respondents are considered as EFL because of very limited exposure of English Language.

In this research, Krashen's Input Hypothesis can be related directly. The Input Hypothesis is concerned with language production--the ability to use language is a result of competence based on acquisition, while learning acts to enable speakers and writers to "change the output of the acquired system before [they] speak or write" (Krashen, 1985, p. 2). For this monitor (or editor) to operate, Krashen hypothesized, the user needs to be aware of the importance of accuracy, and the rule stating correct forms should be present.

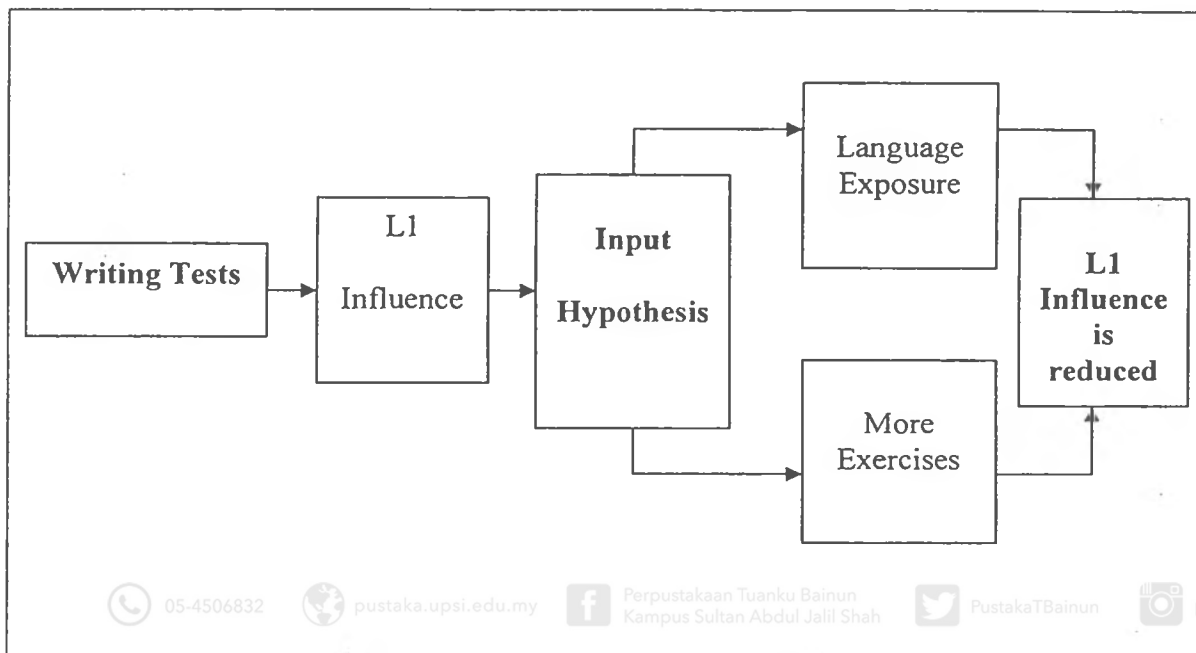
According to Krashen (1982, p.15), learning has the function of monitoring and editing the utterances produced through the acquisition process. The use of input is affected by the amount of time that the L2 learner has at his / her disposal to think about the utterance or writing he or she is about to produce, the focus on form and his / her knowledge of L2 language rules (Krashen, 1981.p.3-4)..

In other words, learners can acquire a language at a faster rate in an environment where the contact language is frequently used. In this case, the language the students were in contact is the Malay Language. The exposure to this second language for the pupils in this is very limited either in formal learning or in informal learning.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

Figure 1.2

Theoretical Framework



In Figure 1.2, the theoretical framework (adapted from Uma Sekaran, 1992, pp 72) shows the network of associations among the theory, variables and the result of this study. Input Hypothesis posits that if there is enough input given to the learners, than we can expect a better output too with proper guidance and sufficient time. The input environment referred here is the exposure to the target language. If the exposure to the target language is maximized, the influence of L1 can be reduced. So, in this study, the ‘experimental treatment’ given to the respondents plays the role as the ‘exposure’ to the language. The ‘experimental treatment’ or exposure to the language by giving a lot of exercises by focusing on the types of errors did by the respondents is a way of minimizing



the L1 influence. The 'experimental treatment' and exposure of L2 moderates the result of the writing tests. The exposure (exercises) of respondents to the L2 manipulates the result of the writing tests by reducing the L1 influence. As the hypothesis suggests, learners can acquire a language at a faster rate in an environment where the contact language is frequently used. This would be proved by comparing the pretests and the posttests results in the writing activities in this study.

1.9 Rationale for the study

The topic intrigued the researcher because the subject matter in this topic is important and might make a difference in some aspect of the English Language teachers and in teaching and learning process generally. The rationale for the researcher to choose this topic is to identify and solve the L1 influence problem in this school. During the teaching and learning lesson, some of the sentences constructed by the students were influenced by their L1. These phenomena influenced their UPSR results for English subject. If no actions were taken immediately, the problem could become worst. Through this research it is believed that some solution can be found to solve and help the pupils to overcome their problems.

Besides that, even though the pupils were taught on writing the correct sentences frequently, they still repeated doing the same errors. So, by identifying the problems and ways to overcome it is hoped that the L1 influence on their writing can be reduced.



1.10 Definitions of Terms

1.10.1 L1.

L1 or First Language is known as one's mother tongue. In this study, the mother tongue or the L1 is Bahasa Malaysia (Malay Language) for the Malay students.

1.10.2 L2.

An L2 user is any person who uses another language other than their first language (L1), that is to say, the one they learnt first as a child. L2 in this study is the English Language. English as second language include those students needing to learn English who live in countries where English is a language, or the language, of the community. So, in Malaysia, English is used as the second language for communication especially in urban areas. But in most of the rural areas, English is still considered as the foreign language.

But in this study the L2 is the English Language.

1.10.3 L1 Interference

Is the negative influence of the mother tongue (L1) on the performance of the target language learner (Lado, 1964).

1.11 Limitations of the Study

This study has a few limitations. The first limitation is the number of English Language teachers as informant for this study. There were only three English language teachers and

only two were involved in the interview. So, the chances to get more information about the students' background and their English proficiency were limited. The second limitation is the number of samples used for this study. There are only thirty pupils who were selected randomly. This is because the class only has 30 pupils and moreover the headmistress did not allow the researcher to take participants more than one class.

Furthermore, the choices of grammatical items to be analyzed in this study is only focusing on three aspects; word order, omission of indefinite article *the* and spelling. This is to focus to the main problems faced by the pupils in this school.

1.12 Significance of the study

As the influence of L1 on L2 has become a national problem (Asmah Hj Omar, 1982), it is hoped that the methods used to overcome the L1 influence can be used by other teachers too to solve the problem in their schools.

The study will:

1.12.1. Identify, describe, categorize, and diagnose Bahasa Malaysia speakers' (Malays students) errors in constructing English sentences in order to find the sources of those errors and a way for remediation;

1.12.2 Help to overcome Bahasa Malaysia influence problem while teaching English language in Sekolah Kebangsaan Sultan Abdullah by preparing varieties of writing activities for the students like paragraph writing, copy model essays and constructing simple sentences;

1.12.3 Motivate the English Language teachers to be more confident while teaching the students by preparing a writing module for teaching English language;



1.12.4 Increase the passing percentage of English Language in UPSR of Sekolah Kebangsaan Sultan Abdullah by constructing grammatically correct sentences during the examination; and, finally,

1.12.5 Discuss the limitations of this study and propose future areas of research.

