

ENGLISH MORPHEME ACQUISITION ORDER OF MALAY SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF
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ABSTRACT

The objective of the study was to investigate the order of English morpheme acquisition (EMAO) by 600 early adolescent Malay secondary students (MSS) aged 13 years (Form 1), 14 years (Form 2) and 16 years old (Form 4) who were learning English in two different settings: urban or English as second language (ESL) and rural or English as a foreign language (EFL). This was a cross-sectional study adopting a quantitative research method in gathering the data. Two method of written elicitation techniques (translation and compositions) were used to obtain responses from the subjects and two scoring methods (target-like-use and supplience in obligatory context) were used to measure the morphemes supplied. The quantitative findings show that (1) the EMAO-MSS of different age groups in the same setting is similar, (2) the EMAO-MSS is similar to the order of English morpheme acquisition (EMAO) of Makino's (1979) subjects (3) the EMAO-MSS in the urban setting is not similar to the EMAO-MSS in the rural setting, (4) the EMAO-MSS in the urban setting is similar to EMAO of Dulay and Burt's (1974a) subjects, (5) the rural students of different age groups follow similar order of morpheme acquisition, (6) the order of morpheme acquisition of the urban students is significantly correlated to Dulay and Burt (1974a), Pearson correlation coefficient (ρ) is at (.75, $p < .05$) and (.8, $p < 0.1$) for Method 1 and Method 2 respectively but is not correlated to the EMAO-MSS in the rural setting and the Malay ESL/EFL secondary students at (0.4, $p < 0.01$), (7) the EMAO-MSS is similar for morpheme *be* in specific linguistic environments, (8) the differences between EMAO-MSS in the urban/rural, EMAO of Makino's (1979) and EMAO of Dulay and Burt's (197a) suggest deficit input by teachers. (9) A descriptive analysis from the students' writing indicates that the interlanguage of the Malay students in the rural areas is influenced by L1 transfer, avoidance and generalizations. This suggests that the students in different language settings use different learning strategies in learning English as an L2.

PEMEROLEHAN MORFEM BAHASA INGGERIS PELAJAR MELAYU SEKOLAH MENENGAH

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menyelidik tertib aturan pemerolehan morfem Bahasa Inggeris oleh 600 pelajar Melayu dalam lingkungan umur awal remaja di Tingkatan 1, 2 dan 4 (13, 14 dan 16 tahun) yang sedang belajar Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua di bandar (ESL) dan Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL) di luar bandar. Kaedah kajian rentas kuantitatif digunakan untuk mengumpul dan menganalisis data. Dua teknik mengumpul data secara penulisan (terjemahan dan mengarang) digunakan untuk mengumpul data dan dua kaedah pemarkahan digunakan (1) penggunaan morfem cara betul penutur asal dan (2) penggunaan morfem pada tempat yang tepat/betul (SOC) untuk mengukur kebolehan penggunaan morfem Bahasa Inggeris gramatis. Dapatan kuantitatif menunjukkan bahawa (1) tertib aturan pemerolehan morfem pelajar dalam persekitaran yang sama adalah sama, (2) tertib aturan pemerolehan morfem pelajar bandar adalah sama dengan pelajar Jepun (Makino, 1979), (3) tertib aturan pemerolehan morfem di antara persekitaran bandar dan luar bandar adalah tidak sama, (4) tertib aturan pemerolehan morfem pelajar bandar adalah sama dengan subjek Dulay dan Burt (1974a), (5) pelajar luar bandar yang berbeza umur mengikuti aturan tertib yang sama, (6) tertib aturan pemerolehan pelajar bandar adalah berkorelasi signifikan dengan susunan yang didapati oleh Dulay and Burt (1974a) pada ukuran rho (+.75, $p < .05$) dan (.8, $p < 0.1$) untuk Kaedah 1 dan Kaedah 2 tetapi berkorelasi tidak signifikan dengan susunan pemerolehan morfem pelajar luar bandar dan juga pelajar Melayu umumnya pada rho (0.4, $p < 0.01$), (7) pelajar Melayu di bandar dan di luar bandar mengikuti susunan pemerolehan morfem yang sama untuk *be* dalam lingkungan linguistik yang berbeza (8) perbezaan antara tertib aturan pelajar bandar/luar bandar dengan Makino (1979) dan Dulay dan Burt (1974a) adalah disebabkan kualiti pengajaran yang tidak menepati kualiti kandungan. (9) Analisis secara deskriptif pula menunjukkan antarbahasa pelajar Melayu di luar bandar dipengaruhi oleh Bahasa Ibunda, elakan dan kesalahan membuat generalisasi. Sebagai kesimpulan, pelajar di kawasan yang berbeza menggunakan strategi pembelajaran yang berbeza dalam menguasai bahasa kedua.

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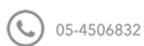
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List of Abbreviations

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4M Model	The 4M Model – Model of Morpheme Analysis
Adj P	Adjective Phrase
Aux-be	Auxiliary be
BICS	Basic interpersonal communication skills
BMK	Bailey, Madden & Krashen’s Order of Morpheme Acquisition (1974)
BSM	Bilingual Syntax Measure
CA	Contrastive analysis
CLT	Communicative language teaching
correct	correct suppliance in obligatory context
det	Determiner
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EA	Error Analysis
EFL	English as a foreign language
EMAO	English morpheme acquisition order
EMAO-DB	English morpheme acquisition order of Dulay and Burt (1974a)
ESL	English as a second language
F1, F2, F4	Form One, Two and Four
FL	Foreign language
IL	Interlanguage
inappropriate	inappropriate suppliance in obligatory contexts
L1	First Language or mother-tongue
L2	Second language
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LAD	Language Acquisition Device
M1, M2	Method 1 Scoring Procedure, Method 2 Scoring Procedure
M1F1U	Method 1 Scoring Procedure, Form 1, Urban (Sample Code No.)
misformation	Suppliance of misforms in obligatory context
non	Suppliance in non-obligatory context
NP	Noun Phrase
PMR	Peperiksaan Menengah Rendah (Lower Secondary Certificate)
R	Rural (Malay Students)
S1F1CU	Student No. 1, Form 1, Composition, Urban
S101F1CR	Student No. 101, Form 1, Composition, Rural
SES	Socioeconomic status
SLA	Second language acquisition
SV	Subject + Verb
SL1&2P	Student First and Second Language Proficiency
SOC	Suppliance in obligatory context (obligatory)
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysian Certificate of Education).
SRP	Sijil Rendah Pelajaran (Lower Certificate of Education)
STPM	Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (Higher Malaysian Certificate of Education).
TL	Target language
U	Urban (Malay Students)
UG	Universal Grammar
UPSR	Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (Primary School Assessment Test)
V	Verb

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V+ing Present Participle. (Verb + ing) form
VP Verb Phrase
prog-aux Progressive auxiliary



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction



Morphological knowledge is basic linguistic knowledge which is important in the learning of language skills such as reading, writing, listening and speaking. However, the morphological area has long been noted as an area of difficulty for all English as a second language learners (ESL) and, specifically, it poses a great problem to Malay ESL and English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, who have mixed exposure to the language (Pica, 1983). A majority of rural students receive input only in the classroom similar to that in a foreign language (FL) setting, while others, for example, urban students, have richer exposure and they use the target-language (TL) at home or outside the classroom, which is similar to a second language (L2) learning setting. The quality of input provided helps to develop morphological and lexical knowledge of a language. Hence, the constraints of input in learning an L2 in a FL setting which are usually not present in L1 might affect the developmental processes of

acquiring L2 and L1 significantly. Learners who are learning L2 in an ESL setting, do not experience these constraints (poor input) since learning L2 in natural environment takes place in the same way as learning an L1, where most words or morphemes are acquired in contexts which provide the meaning. However L2 learners in a FLA setting learn the meaning of words and morphemes explicitly in classrooms, which often lack sufficient contextualized input in the target language. For instance, certain words have different meanings and have to be acquired in different contexts, so teachers need to bring real life situations or provide simulation to give a natural language experience. Also, other factors may influence second language acquisition, such as personality, cognitive style, language environment, attitude, motivation, age and the learner's L1 background (Ellis, 1997). In spite of all the differences, the nature of input and the background of the learners' first language, the researcher notes that there is a general pattern in L2 acquisition of the English language by all second language learners (Cook, 1993) as well as Malay ESL/EFL learners.

Since the early 1970s, researchers have been trying to determine if there is a common order in both L1 and L2 morpheme acquisition. For example, it is observed that L1 children at an early age seem to leave out grammatical morphemes rather than content morphemes (Wei, 2000). Lightbown and Spada (1999) suggest that there is a high degree of similarity between the way learners acquire their first and second languages and there are predictable patterns in the emergence and development of many features of languages they are learning. These findings as well as other areas of enquiry show us that we have considerable knowledge of what language features learners learn first in their early language development and also how this development occurs. The current research findings should be able to provide more insight in describing and explaining how L2 learning takes place in different language settings. This

is relevant to the practice of language teaching in Malaysia in terms of sequencing, ordering and grading of grammatical morphemes.

1.1 Morpheme acquisition in language development

Morpheme acquisition is very important in the development of first and second languages (Hannahs & Stotko, 1997; Bardovig-Harlig, 1999, 2000; Salaberry & Shirai, 2002). As morphemes are the smallest meaningful linguistic units used to build other units, such as words, phrases, utterances, and syntax, morpheme knowledge is very important in learning word building, semantics or pragmatics in any language (Bardovig-Harlig, 1999, 2000). The acquisition of morphemes is considered a significant initial step towards the proper development of language competence (Pinker & Prince, 1992; Bardovig-Harlig, 1999, 2000; Murphy, 2000; Salaberry & Shirai, 2002). Many language development studies, for example those found in Berninger (2001) and Green *et al*, (2003) show that morphological knowledge is the basic linguistic knowledge which is important in the learning of reading, writing, listening and speaking skills (Carlisle, 2000).

Grammatical morphemes include both bound and free morphemes. Verbal and nominal suffixes like past tense *ed* in *Ali jumped* and the plural *s* in *Birds are flying* are bound grammatical morphemes, and free morphemes are like those of the auxiliary verb *be* in constructions like *Ali is running* and as in copula *be*, *Ali is here* as well as auxiliary-do in *Do you play football?* and the articles in *the bird* and *a bird*. Grammatical morphemes are a structure class which is different from content morphemes such as the noun *bird* and the verbs

play and fly

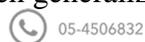
In the initial stage of language acquisition, students must be able to learn morphological parses and discriminate different morphological and syntactic segmentation of different linguistic units such as morphemes, words, phrases, clauses and sentences which are meaningful in the target language. In acquiring morphemes, students have to discover whether certain affixes are bound or free morphemes. For example, a student learning English must be able to discover that the word-initial unit, *re* is a prefix, and that the word *remake* is prefixed, whereas the word *retail*, probably is not, even though it begins with *re*. Later, a learner must discover the syntactic and semantic properties associated with each affix of the language, in order to be able to produce and understand new words. For example, an ESL/EFL learner must discover that *re* is a prefix that is attached to verbs to create other verbs with different meanings (*e.g.* *re* + *make*). However, to learn the morphological properties of an affix, the learner must first of all notice the existence of that affix (*e.g.* *re* + *make*).

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Over the past thirty years research in second language (L2) acquisition has attempted to describe and explain what L2 learners do, and how they acquire these morphemes and other linguistic units in a new language. Many researchers such as Cummins (2000) investigated the process of second language acquisition (SLA) using longitudinal and cross-sectional methods, and found that the knowledge of L2 learners is a system that may be described and interpreted in relation to the first language (L1).

Learners normally do not produce the correct forms of these linguistic units when they first try to use them in communication. The process of construction of the new language is however systematic and is termed an interlanguage (Selinker, 1972). It is believed that at any point in time, the L2 exists in the non-native speaker's mind as a system of interrelated tentative rules, still primitive for the production of the second language. Errors are inevitable

and constantly changing because the learners' interlanguage rules are being adapted as they receive and analyze more input in the process of acquiring the target language (TL) (Corder, 1981). The development of errors has been considered an indication of the difficulties the learners have had with certain aspects of the language (Bardovig-Harligg, 2000). It is assumed that a learner's errors provide evidence of the system of the language that he or she is manipulating at a particular stage in the course of language acquisition. Researches in the analysis of L2 learners (Corder, 1967; Nemser, 1971; Selinker, 1972) show that a language user possesses a set of cognitive structures acquired by certain processes, and the errors are not indicative of faulty learning or the need for instructional intervention. In fact, Dulay and Burt (1974c) claim that making errors is a necessary condition in the learning process. It is certain that even in one's L1, making errors by first simplifying and overgeneralizing the rules and then generalizing and reconstructing the rules of the TL is a natural development.



1.1.1 The process of interlanguage development

Researchers such as Pinker (1989), Levin (1993), Wang and Hun-tak Lee, (1999) and Zhang (2004) argue that there are many variables that actually influence the process of interlanguage development. These factors, such as input, personality, cognitive style, language environment, attitude, motivation, age and the background of the learner's L1, have different effects on L2 learners. Krashen (1987) postulates the Monitor Theory and the comprehensible input hypothesis to explain internal factors such as motivation and emotional state and external factors that affect L2 acquisition. Gardner and Lambert (1972) argued that positive attitude and motivation will likely lead to the success of SLA. Swain (1985) stresses the

importance of output among learners who need the opportunity to produce language in order to develop native-speaker levels of grammatical proficiency. In short, both internal and external factors play important parts in L2 development and make the path toward L2 acquisition difficult to predict.

Gass (1988) suggests that the process of language acquisition occurs in five stages, which show overlapping, yet distinguishable sets of processes. First, exposed to the ambient input, learners perceive selected aspects of the input, from which they derive some form of meaning representations of the input messages. Comprehension and intake are considered to represent different processes, of which only the latter is used for further processing for learning. Through the processes of hypothesis formation, testing, modification, confirmation, and rejection, the intake may subsequently be integrated into the developing system. Finally, learners selectively use their developing system in their output. The output process is not only a product of acquisition, but also an active component in the overall acquisition processes.

Jiang (2000) suggests that the acquisition of L2 (*e.g.* vocabulary) in instructional settings has three unique features: (a) a lexical entry that consists of L2 lexeme and L1 lemma; (b) little morphological specifications are integrated within the entry; (c) the links between L2 words and concepts are weak. In the first stage or the formal stage, once a lexical entry with formal specifications is established, the lemma information of the L1 counterpart is copied into the L2 lexical entry and mediates L2 word use, and the L2 integration stage occurs when semantic, syntactic, morphological specifications are integrated into the lexical entry. The central role of the lemma is to bridge the gap between the message to be communicated and the surface structure that is actually articulated to express the message. In the second stage, the use of L2 is produced automatically, where initially an L2 lexical entry contains no

semantic and syntactic information, but contains words in L1 translation equivalent. Hence, the choice of L2 words at this stage is dependent on the activation of the lexical links between L2 and L1, which is probably why students make many morphological errors in the early stage of learning.

1.1.2 Second language learning in the classroom

The quality of L2 instruction in schools depends on the quality of input provided by teachers based on suitable teaching techniques used in the classrooms (Ellis, 2006). Learning L2 in explicit teaching classrooms requires critical comprehensible input, whether it is from natural speech or explicit teaching (Norris & Ortega, 2000). A learner must have perceptual ability that will determine how much the learner will receive from the input. The different quality of input provides significantly different pace of acquisition among the learners. The input reveals how well learners have prepared themselves to recognize morpheme forms from a continuous speech stream or explicit classroom teaching. They do not receive the speech stream as a discrete sequence of individual sounds. The input and the perceptual ability together are the basis for any learner to acquire a morpheme for understanding and producing larger linguistic units such as words, phrases or sentences. Without adequate input, a learner will not be able to develop morphological knowledge or lexicon, let alone a language. Hence, without proper perception of input, a learner cannot receive adequate input, and therefore cannot acquire any language properly (Norris & Ortega, 2000).

Effective teachers provide better input to the students in terms of good language models, easy presentation and suitable learning experiences (Larsen-Freeman, 1990, Burden

& Byrd, 2003; Ornstein & Lasley, 2004). Even though all teachers have to use the syllabus provided by the Ministry of Education, the interpretation of the syllabus is crucial in determining a successful learning programme such as using suitable learning materials and teaching approaches. There is no way a student in a foreign language acquisition (FLA) environment can get good language input if the teacher does not provide it. Quality input obviously depends on the quality of teaching and the ability of the teachers teaching the subject and whether they can motivate learners to learn effectively. One of the most used teaching methods in Malaysian schools is the communicative method or approach. However, there is a conflict between the official syllabus, the textbook syllabus and the examination syllabus putting teachers in a dilemma over what to teach (Pillay & North, 1997). The official syllabus and the textbooks stress topics or themes; whereas, teachers focus on examinations by teaching to the tests rather than developing the language skills. It is therefore unclear whether teachers develop the skills of segmenting the language units explicitly or implicitly based on the communicative approach in teaching grammar or specifically vocabulary.

1.1.3 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Comprehensible Input

In Malaysia, CLT was adopted in the early 1970s. CLT is based on the notion that learners as communicators are naturally endowed with the ability to learn languages and the target language system in many predictable and unpredictable acts of communication which arises both in classroom interaction and in real-world situations. Learners develop language competency from the lessons in the classroom as well as subsequent use of the language outside the classrooms. (Yalden, 1987). This approach is normally associated with the

Canadian immersion programmes which aim at the achievement of both academic and L2 learning through an integration of language teaching and content teaching. It has generally had great success in many areas of students' language development (*e.g.* listening comprehension, fluency, functional abilities, confidence in using the L2) However, these learners have also been found to have problems in some aspects of the target language (TL) grammar, especially in morpho-syntactic areas, even after many years in these programmes (Harley & Swain 1984; Swain 1985; Harley 1986, 1992). Swain (1985) argues that one of the important reasons for this is that these learners engage in too little language production, which prevents them from going beyond a functional level of L2 proficiency. Many teachers adapt the immersion programme without being aware or without even considering the nature of the learners' background. For example, the immersion programme in Canadian classrooms actually consisted of French-speaking students as well as English-speaking students. This situation provided a good environment for French-speaking students to use English with their English-speaking friends. However, the situation in Malaysia is not the same. Even though students of different races are put together in the national school, most of them hardly speak English. The situation does not permit Malay students to use and improve English, unlike the French students in the Canadian immersion programme with their English speaking classmates.

The other important consideration which is normally neglected by teachers is the students' different linguistic backgrounds. Some teachers fail to address the different needs of students in their classrooms. For example, there are native speakers whose home language is English, and are bilinguals who learn the language spontaneously from their parents and use the English language at home or in their neighborhoods. However, the majority of students