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INTERFERENCE OF FIRST LANGUAGE TOWARDS WRITING IN ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This study was aimed to analyze and evaluate the extent of interference of L1 (Tamil) in L2 (English) ESL writing. The SLA Threshold model was employed based on the constituents of behaviorist and mentalist theories. The study analyzed the phenomena and the contributing variables as a result of the interference. The relationship between phenomena and contributing variables were also studied. Mixed method approaches with a concurrent triangulation design were used for this study. A number of 60 pre-service teachers in a teacher education institution in Ipoh were chosen using purposive sampling method as studied samples. Three research instruments were employed which are a questionnaire, a protocol interview and document analysis. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential analysis. Descriptive analysis describes the extent of interference in the ESL writing while inferential statistics which involved a Pearson and Spearman correlation analysis explains the differences and relationship between the studied variables. The findings showed that there were significant inaccurate syntax and morphology patterns in the ESL writing due to interference of mother tongue and strategies used by the subjects. Pearson correlation analysis showed a significant relationship between the application of strategies and the ESL writing. As a conclusion, there were contributing variables which resulted from the application of strategies of the writing. The study implicates that the use of a pedagogical methodology based on behaviorist theory can promote practical and interactive activities to teach in an ESL context.

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INTERFERENSI BAHASA PERTAMA TERHADAP PENULISAN BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisa dan menilai sejauh mana pengaruh bahasa pertama (Tamil) dalam penulisan bahasa kedua (Inggeris). Berasaskan teori behaviourist dan mentalist, model pemerolehan bahasa kedua (SLA Threshold model) diamalkan. Kajian juga menganalisa fenomena dan pembolehubah yang menyumbang terhadap pengaruh ini. Pendekatan kaedah campuran dengan reka bentuk triangulasi serentak telah digunakan dalam kajian ini. Pemilihan subjek kajian dijalankan secara persampelan bertujuan melibatkan 60 orang guru pra-perkhidmatan salah sebuah institusi perguruan di Ipoh.Tiga jenis instrumen kajian digunakan iaitu soal selidik, protokol temuduga dan analisa dokumen.Data dianalisis dengan menggunakan analisis deskriptif dan inferensi. Analisis deskriptif menjelaskan tahap pengaruh bahasa pertama dalam penulisan bahasa kedua, manakala statistik inferensi pula melibatkan ujian korelasi Pearson dan Spearman yang menerangkan perbezaan serta hubungan antara pemboleh ubah kajian. Hasil kajian menunjukan terdapat peningkatan pengaruh bahasa secara signifikan dalam penulisan bahasa kedua. Analisis Pearson dan Spearman pula menunjukkan terdapat hubungan yang signifikan antara penggunaan strategi dan penulisan bahasa kedua. Kesimpulan daripada kajian menunjukkan pembolehubah yang menyumbang berdasarkan penggunaan strategi dalam penulisan bahasa kedua. Implikasi kajian menunjukkan penggunaan kaedah pedagogi berasaskan teori behaviorist dapat meningkatkan keberkesanan menggunakan aktitivi interaktif dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa kedua.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Dis.	Dissimilarities
ESL	English as a Second Language
IL	Interlanguage
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
Sim.	Similarities
SLA	Second Language Acquisition

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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1.0 Introduction

The introductory chapter describes the context and framework in four main sections. The first section outlines the context of second language writing in Malaysia. The next section describes the role of English language in Malaysian context. The following section outlines the English language curriculum for ESL pre-service teachers. Lastly, the section outlines the purpose, problem statement, need for the study, significance of the study, the research questions, definiton of terms and the structure of the thesis .

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1.1 Background of the Study

There is a significant difference how native learners write English and how writers learning English as a second language or target language write. This is because the latter, have more than one language at their disposal while they are composing as compared to native learners or English as a second language learners. Academic writing is an active cognitive process and when learners internalize the language, errors can be eliminated (McLaughlin, 1988). Since writing is a complex process, learners use both their first and second language for cognitive operations when they are composing in the second language (Ang, Rahim, Tan, & Salehuddin, 2011). According to O Malley Chamot 1990, learners apply various strategies to compose in meaningful structures but find it difficult to develop the writing stages effectively. Since, they have more than one language in their system, it brings more problems and learners tend to switch those languages interactively, therefore causing some confusion in the structure and meaning (Darus & Ching, 2009) . One important difference between L1 and L2 writing is that L2 writers have more than one language at their disposal. As a result, they may use both L1 and L2 for cognitve operations when they are composing in their L2 (Lightbrown and Spada, 2006).

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In the domain of second language writing, one consistent and salient characteristic which is fundamentally distinct from first language writing is that second language writers often switch back or forth between their first language and second language in order to overcome a problem. In actual fact, they are struggling while composing in the second language (Darus & Ching, 2009). The learner begins the task of learning a second language from point zero and through the steady

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accumulation of the mastered entities of the target language, eventually amasses them in quantities sufficient to constitute a particular level of proficiency in order to master the target language (Nooshin, 2014). If this is the case then we would expect that well-formed, accurate and complete target language structures to emerge on the learner's path towards eventual mastery of the target language. In reality this is not the case because second language learners usually are able to accumulate structural components of the target language but fail to organise this knowledge into appropritate and coherent structures (Darus & Ching, 2009). In fact, there appears to be a significant gap between the accumulation and the organisation of the knowledge especially in their written texts (Nooshin, 2014). Usually when writing in the target language (L2), second language learners tend to rely on their native language (L1) structures to produce a meaningful response (Widdowson, 1990). Language learners sometimes use their native language to generate ideas and details (Friedlander 1996). According to Kern (2000), when learners write in a second language, they generally produce texts containing varying degree of grammatical errors. If the structures of the two languages are distinctly different, then one could expect a relatively high frequency of errors in L2, thus indicating an interference of L1 on L2 (Lado,1957).

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Language learning is a mechanical process concerning habit formation (Nelson, Brooks 1960). Some of the strategies of langauge within the scope of behaviourists are imitation, reinforcement and repetition. Behaviourists view language acquisition as the result of habit formation, through which the learning process takes place (Lin & Texas, 2014). This belief was based on the behaviourist theory of language learning where learning was equated with habit formation (W. Yu, 2011). Adversely, the interest in language learning was focussed on the role of the mother

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tongue as the failure to gain the new habits of the second language was thought to be related to first language (Abeywickrama, 2011). According to Odlin (1989), transfer is the influence resulting from similarities or differences between target language and any other language which is acquired. Transfer from L1 to L2 was considered a form of interference of L1 habits on L2 learning (Erarslan & Hol, 2014). Many behaviorists argue that L1 interference is a major problem for L2 learners (Corder, 2000).

Lado (1957) stated that L2 learners are entirely dependent on their mother tongue in learning the target language. This situation is dominant in the L2 learner's productive and receptive skills which are greatly influenced by not merely by L1 patterns, but also includes the factor of how great the similarities or differences between L1 and L2 languages are (Erarslan & Hol, 2014). For instance, if L1 and L2 are similar in features and characteristics, then the interference may not be as great and prominent (Bennui, 2008). As most of the strategies are similar in L1 and L2, L2 learners may be able to transfer from L1 to L2 writing (Erarslan & Hol, 2014). Transfer can be a conscious or an unconscious process. Learners may consciously allow influences of mother tongue in their L2 writing which often results in absence of knowledge. On the other hand, when learners do not realize the differences between structures and internal rules of the language, this is known as an unconscious process. Both the processes results in errors due to non-existence of certain structures in the target language (Sharwood Smith, 1986).

Teachers and educators usually neglect the problem of L1 interference in L2 writing and prioritize learner's problems in syntax, lexis and discourse aspects. However in the ESL writing context, interference is an important factor to be

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taken into consideration (El-dali, 2012). When L2 writers write in the target language, some features of L1 are dominant and present in L2 writing (Bennui, 2008). Furthermore, L1 interference refers to the influence of L1 structures on students L2 writing (Liu, 2011). This is even more crucial for students from the vernacular schools (Darus & Ching, 2009). Thinking in English when writing in English is difficult because L1 interferes in L2 written texts (Bennui, 2008). In terms of SLA, the influence of L1 on L2 learning has been considered as interference but according to Cumming (1989), the background of L1 serves the platform for L2 learning and promotes the ability to write. Therefore for Tamil medium students thinking in English when writing in the English language is difficult as L1(Tamil) structures are inevitable and therefore interferes with their written L2(English) (Javed & Phil, 2012). This is even more prominent among learners from Tamil medium schools where Tamil is used as the instructional language for all the subjects taught and learnt, and not English. It was also mentioned that L2 learners do not depend heavily on the L1 since they have sufficient level of L2 knowledge to think and write in L2 (Jones and Tetroe, 1987). As reported by Raimes (1985), low proficiency writers rely heavily on their L1 especially during the writing process. The learners in fact use some strategies such as reducing information, simplifying syntax, substitute lexical items and ignore information (Uzawa, 1989). However, according to Kobayashi (1994), these composing strategies benefitted low L2 proficient writers. However, Yun (2005), found that low L2 writers who did not use their L1 were less efficient. This is the gap the present study would like to investigate. The gap is to what degree L2 writers transfer L1 during their strategies of composing in L2

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writing and what are the strategies used by low proficient writers to transfer to L2 writing.

Therefore this study will look into interference of L1 (Tamil language) on L2 (English language) among ESL pre-service teachers in an ESL context. The focus of this study is mainly on instances of L1 interference on L2 in the syntactic structures of L2 writing. This study also aims to identify the learning and transfer strategies used in ESL writing. Inaccuracy in sentence structures occur when L1 learning interferes with L2 learning and this approach demands an immediate treatment of learners sentence structures (Alexandra Cabrera Solano et al., 2014). The general consenses was that inaccuracy in sentence structures could be detected by comparing the grammar of L1 and L2 especially in the written forms. If there were differences in L1 and the target language, the errors are likely and prominent (Khansir, 2012). This study would also investigate to what extent non target L2 (English language) patterns in the writing of ESL pre-service teachers can be a function of L1 (Tamil language) transfer. In the process of second language acquisition, the problem is whether the acquisition of the particular aspect of that language is a positive or negative transfer and to what extent is the interference (Odlin, 2003). Strategy is a technique used by L2 learners to learn the target language (Gvarishvili, 2013). This study would investigate the transfer and learning strategies used by second language learners and the contributing factors to determine the extent of interference in the sentence structures. One of the prominent strategies used by L2 learners is to transfer some features of the mother tongue to the target language (Erarslan & Hol, 2014). During the process when learners assume that the features of mother tongue are also present in the target

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