

**A STUDY OF SIMPLE PAST TENSE ERROR AND ITS SOURCE IN FORM
TWO STUDENTS' WRITTEN COMPOSITIONS**

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2005**

PENGAKUAN

Saya mengaku disertasi ini adalah hasil kerja saya sendiri kecuali nukilan ringkasan yang setiap satunya saya jelaskan sumbernya.

10.03.2005

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DECLARATION

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

10-03-2005

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Abstrak

Pembelajaran tatabahasa Bahasa Inggeris sememangnya diakui sebagai sesuatu yang bermasalah kepada pelajar-pelajar di Malaysia. Pelajar-pelajar menghasilkan banyak kesalahan dalam tatabahasa Bahasa Inggeris yang melibatkan kedua-dua kemahiran penerimaan dan penghasilan. Kajian ini meneliti seramai 30 orang pelajar Tingkatan Dua dari Sekolah Menengah Raja Muda Musa, Teluk Intan, Perak untuk menentukan jenis-jenis kesalahan ‘simple past tense’ serta punca-punca kesalahan tersebut daripada dua jenis karangan. Terdapat tiga jenis kesalahan iaitu kesalahan ‘penambahan’, ‘tertinggal’ dan ‘kesalahfahaman maklumat’ telah dibuat oleh responden-responden kajian ini. Kajian ini juga mendapati punca utama kesalahan mereka adalah dari segi kekurangan asas pengetahuan mengenai ‘simple past tense.’ Di antara beberapa punca utama kesalahan mereka ialah pengaruh bahasa ibunda, kekeliruan penggunaan tatabahasa dan salah interpretasi tatabahasa. Beberapa kaedah pengajaran dan strategi pembelajaran untuk mengatasi masalah ‘simple past tense’ di cadangkan di akhir kajian ini.

Abstract

The learning of English grammar, especially the tenses has been recognized as a problem area to ESL learners. Learners produce numerous errors in receptive and productive skills of the English Language. This study examined the categories, types and sources of simple past tense errors made by 30 form two students from Sekolah Menengah Raja Muda Musa, Teluk Intan, Perak. The rationale for this study was to help the researcher to extend knowledge about simple past tense error and its sources. The instruments were two sets of compositions. The errors have been classified under two categories, interlingual and intralingual. The findings of this study indicate that respondents produced three types of errors, namely misinformation, addition and omission. The most frequent were errors caused by intralingual interference. Besides that, this study also indicate the sources of errors which are mother tongue interference, over generalization and rule restriction or wrong application of rule. The researcher has focussed on SLA theory which relates how L2 learners acquire grammatical sub-system such as past tense. Several teaching approaches and strategies are recommended for example the integrated approach to teach simple past tense, focussed grammar practices and direct method at the end of this study to enhance the teaching and learning process of simple past tense.

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Abstrak

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Abstract

The learning of English Grammar especially the tenses has been recognized as a problem area to Malaysian English learners. Learners produce numerous errors in receptive and productive skills of the English Language. This study examined the categories, types and sources of simple past tense errors made by 30 form two students from Sekolah Menengah Raja Muda Musa, Teluk Intan, Perak. The rationale for this study was to help the researcher to extend knowledge about simple past tense error and its sources. The instruments used were two sets of compositions. The errors have been classified under two categories, interlingual and intralingual. The findings of this study indicate that respondents produced three types of errors, namely misinformation, addition and omission. The most frequent were errors caused by intralingual interference. Besides that, this study also indicates the sources of error which are mother tongue interference, over generalization and rule restriction or wrong application of rule. The researcher has focused on SLA theory which relates how L2 learners acquire grammatical sub-system such as past tense. Several teaching approaches and learning strategies are recommended for example the integrated approach to teach simple past tense, focused grammar practices and direct method at the end of this study to enhance the teaching and learning process of the Simple Past Tense.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

“Errors” are defined as something incorrectly done through ignorance, inadvertence, and a mistake for example in calculation, judgement, speech, writing and action (Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, 1996). Errors in second language learning on the other hand arise basically through the inaccurate or inappropriate use of certain phoneme, syntactic or semantic items and the structures of the target language from the point of view of grammar and accepted usage. Error Analysis is concerned with the identification, description and explanation of errors made by language learners, either in spoken or in written form (Corder, 1974).

The study of language errors made by second language learners has been a subject of interest among linguists and language teachers. Language teaching approaches and methods are not shaped within a vacuum but is influenced by trends and research in various related disciplines as well as the socio-political context of a particular time. The relationship between all these factors similarly influence how

grammar is presented in each method or approach. Kelly (1969) summarizes language teaching into three broad aims. The first aim, the social aim, demands that language be regarded as a form of social behavior and a type of communication. The second aim is the artistic or literary aim, which treats language as a vehicle of creativity. The third aim, the philosophical aim, demands training in analytical techniques and views language as structure. It becomes quite apparent from these three aims that grammar will be given varying and differential emphases according to the aim of language teaching which predominates.

Kelly (1969) summarizes the evolution of second language teaching into four eras. These are the 12th to the 15th centuries where language was taught for literary purposes; the renaissance era where language was translated into modern language for literary purposes; the 17th to 19th centuries where grammar was taught for social purposes of language subordinate and the introduction of the grammar translation evolution; and finally, the 19th and 20th centuries where natural and direct methods predominate the teaching of language. Kelly's (1969) historical survey of English language teaching provides an interesting description regarding how grammar instruction has been regarded during different periods of the long history of language teaching.

Although Latin may have lost some of its influence during this period, its impact on the educational framework of the time had already been firmly established in many aspects related to language education. This influence is evident in the grammar-translation method, the language teaching methodology that evolved from the individualized techniques used during the classical period. Numerous language reformers attempted to "fix" the orthography and grammar of the language and despite limited success, they contributed to a general outlook regarding the

importance of good grammar. Undoubtedly, this too can be said to have some indirect effect on language teaching and the grammar translation method.

The grammar translation method employed the techniques of grammar presentation and translation not as new techniques but rather as familiar techniques that were used in individual instruction during the classical period. Howatt (1986) claims that the method was reformist motivated and was intended to make language learning easier. The grammar translation method retained the framework of grammar and translation simply because most teachers and learners alike were familiar with those techniques.

Probably the central feature of the grammar translation method that distinguished it from the earlier individualized techniques of the classical period was the replacement of the text with exemplary sentences. These sentences were disconnected sentences that focussed on particular grammatical structures. A common exercise in grammar translation was the translation into and out of the foreign language. The grammar translation method began innocently enough as each lesson had “*one or two new grammar rules, a short vocabulary list, and some practice examples to translate*” (Howatt, 1986, p. 136).

Grammar translation uses word class grammar and syntactic analysis was often restricted to “a few comments on word order and a lot of fuss about “local” problems such as making verbs agree with their nouns” (Howatt, 1986, p.137). Unfortunately, this approach encouraged the construction of sentences on a word by word basis with each word added to the one before in a linear, arithmetic fashion. As a result, awkward sentences such as “ the book of my sister” could be grammatically constructed. The “*arithmetic fallacy*” as described by Henry Sweet (cited in Howatt, 1986, p.143), made it almost impossible to distinguish “*grammatical*” sentences from

those that most native speakers would deem “*unacceptable*.” Nevertheless, despite these weaknesses the grammar translation method existed in one form or another for at least a century until the mid to late 19th century.

The Direct Method was an amalgamation of the different ideas suggested by the individual reformers and the reform Movement of the 19th century. It represents “*a shift from literary language to the spoken, everyday language as the object of early instruction, a goal that was totally lacking in Grammar Translation*” (Stern, 1986, p. 458). The Direct Method focuses on oral presentation in the target language by the teacher in classrooms. Grammatical explanation was delayed or simply ignored as learners were expected to become aware of such ‘rules’ inductively, much like a child learning his or her first language. Whatever success the method may have had, it seemed to be more a result of the teacher’s teaching abilities rather than the method itself. It involved the “art of teaching” rather than sound theoretical foundations, “performance ‘ rather than “actual hard science”(Stern, 1986, p. 456). It was due to this weakness in theory that the Direct Method gradually lost some of its popularity.

Unlike the Direct Method, the Audiolingual Method (ALM) which gained popularity beginning from 1940’s was firmly grounded in linguistic and psychological theory. The strong focus on grammatical structures, yet ambivalent attitude towards explanation of grammatical rules, can best be understood by studying the theoretical principles that the ALM derived from both psychology and linguistics. The learning process in the ALM has been described as “one of habituation and conditioning without the intervention of any intellectual analysis” (Stern, 1986, p. 458). Active and simple practice through the use of memorization and repetition drills is the rule with the intention of making language learning “less of a mental burden and more a matter of relatively effortless and frequent repetition and imitation.”

(Stern 1986, p.465). These drills were an essential feature of audiolingualism in dealing with linguistic structures.

Audio lingualism's concern was primarily on the oral and aural skills. Syntax was avoided as a primary object of the study. Noam Chomsky's first work, *Syntactic Structures*, (Chomsky 1980), broke from the traditions of his time. Firstly, instead of examining the observable corpus of utterances as his initial starting point for describing grammar, Chomsky focussed on the inner "mechanism" underlying language use. Chomsky's ideas, despite having a strong impact on language teaching methodology, were not presented as part of a new methodology. As a result, numerous methods emerged in reaction not only to his ideas but also to the non-mentalistic approach of the Audiolingual method. In conclusion, it underscored the importance of both the fields of cognitive psychology and linguistics in the analysis of language development.

Pedagogical descriptions are "*aids to learning, not the object of learning*" (Corder 1988, p. 34). The express form of such a grammar is neither readily available nor fully developed. Rutherford (1987 p.125) believes pedagogical grammar should address the following questions: What kinds of rules are we talking about? How much of what happens in language use can we account for through such rules? What does teaching a rule really mean? Rutherford's (1987) focus however, was not on "low-level syntax" such as subject-verb agreement, plural markers, and possessive statement but on the ways in which the target language conceptualizes reality and the grammaticalization of those concepts.

Halliday (1973) and Hymes (1977) considered Chomsky's description of competence as too abstract and limited to be of any practical use. Hymes (1977) in particular was convinced that Chomsky's notion of competence did not sufficiently

account for the social and functional rules of language. Hymes (1977) suggested that it was important to distinguish between linguistic and communicative competence in order to distinguish between the knowledge “about” language forms and the knowledge that enables a person to communicate functionally and interactively. The work of Halliday (1973, p. 136) on the different language functions which describe the “purposive nature of communication” was to further emphasize the socio-linguistic outlook to the notion of competence.

The ideas of Krashen(1969),Halliday (1973) as well as Hymes (1977) led to the development of the communicative approach to language teaching. Communicative theory presents the second language in a more clearly specified social context and situation. Canale and Swain (1980), propose the idea that communicative competence is made up of four different competencies – grammatical competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, and socio-linguistic competence. Bachman (1990) suggested that grammatical competence make up a portion of overall language competence. As such grammar occupies a secondary role and as a result, grammar is taught incidentally.

However, the situation is not so in Malaysia ever since the introduction of the KBSM in 1987. Our English language syllabus for secondary schools gives equal emphasis to the oral language skills of listening and speaking and to the literacy language skills of reading and writing. Additionally, the components of language, the sound system, vocabulary, and grammar of the language, are integrated with language skills. The language skills of listening (aural), speaking (oral), reading and writing as well as language contents namely phonology (pronunciation), lexis (vocabulary), grammar and discourse are integrated. The four language skills and language content are closely linked to each other. Language content and language skills are divided for

the purpose of analysis but they should not be regarded as separate items. In everyday communication language skills and language content are linked quite unconsciously. Integration in teaching is one way of trying to make language learning in the classroom more like the real life communication outside the classroom. Integrating two or more skills in the language class brings more benefits for both teachers and learners.

Mastering the mechanics of forming the letters of the alphabets and learning spelling and punctuation rules are needed when writing. Vocabulary needs to be improved in order to use appropriate words. The rules of grammar and syntax of the language are needed so that writing can be understood. While it may be true to say that the traditional role of writing is to monitor and test what has been taught, there are good reasons why writing has an important part to play in the language classroom. With students at the lower ability range, the teacher may need to concentrate on the mechanics of putting pen to paper, practicing letter formation, spelling, punctuation and grammatical structure. Many teachers feel that the writing skill cannot be fully developed until students are able to write correctly from a grammatical point of view. Communicative approaches towards language teaching methodology have brought changes in teaching writing. Poor punctuation, spelling and weaknesses in grammatical knowledge may impede students' writing. Teachers should plan a systematic approach to help students with spelling. Identifying and noting spelling errors in students written work is a good start. Any work that the teacher does in the area of grammar will help the students in all other language skills.