

Analysing Errors among Form One Students' Written English Composition in a Private Chinese School

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ABSTRACT— *Students' studying in a private Chinese school have to master three languages which are Malay, English and Chinese. The first language is Chinese and English which is the second language acquired in school. Students face problems in learning the English language as they need to master the four skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing. Out of these four skills, writing is the major problem among the students. So, this study is aimed at in analyzing errors made by the form one students studying in a private Chinese school in the writing component. There were thirty seven students who wrote an essay on 'The Hero's Journey'. As the students are from Chinese speaking community who only speaks English language during the lessons, they find it difficult to write essays especially when there is a need to express them. All their errors in the essays were identified and classified into various categories. The results showed that the most common errors were made in mechanics, tenses, prepositions, subject-verb-agreement and word choice. This study has highlighted some aspects shared by the students and teachers who are teaching them to internalize the rules of the target language – English language. This study will enable English as second language teachers to understand the nature of the problems faced by students in writing essays and thus, prepare effective teaching materials to teach the students to write a better piece of essay.*

Keywords--- Error analysis, English as a second language, essays in English, writing, grammatical errors

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

English Language is an international language. It is known as the first language spoken by the native speakers and second language by non-native speakers around the world. In Malaysia, English is the second language (L2) after the national language Bahasa Malaysia which was introduced by the British during their colonization. The growth of acquiring the language started along with the development of the country and the breakthrough from the technology which required to be gained by Malaysian students in general.

Thus, the teaching of English language has been given priority in the primary and secondary schools of both the National schools and private independent Chinese schools. English language is being taught in four components; reading, writing, speaking and listening. Students living in the urban area master the language well as their First language whereas for those students from rural area or their mother tongue isn't English, encounter some difficulties to master the language especially in the writing component involving grammatical errors and lack of writing skills. This paper aims to analysis errors in form one students' written English composition in a private Chinese school.

1.2 Background of the Study

The Malaysian Educational system follows the Razak Report of 1956 (Gaudart, 1987) which consists of six years or primary education, five years of secondary education and two years of sixth form. Before the Razak Report the medium of instruction was Malay in most national schools while in the national-type Chinese and Tamil schools use their native language as the mode of instruction. Students of these vernacular schools must learn English and Malay as their compulsory subjects.

In the national schools, the secondary level of education is separated into lower and upper. The lower secondary level comprises of three years which are Form One to Form Three whereas the upper secondary level covers duration of two years which comprises of Form Four and Form Five. As for the national-type schools, there is one year of transition class called 'Remove Class' before entering Form One. So, students from vernacular school face the difficulties in terms of medium of instruction as they need to manage acquiring two languages instead of one.

In the vernacular schools English and Malay are taught as one subject respectively whereas in Form One, all subjects are taught in Malay with one subject in Mandarin and another in English. Hence, students are expected to master and be proficient in English for a brighter future. Today, English is the mode of instruction as claimed by Adams and Keene (2000) as it contributes towards education and students' efficiencies in communication are on top of

institutional demands but most students face the difficulties in writing skills especially proper use of grammar, conventions, punctuations, capitalization, spelling and the basic aspects of writing. This was further enhanced by Pak-TaoNg (2003) that writing comprises of many activities involving understanding like thinking of the topic, gathering information, collecting data, etc. which makes a reflective thought for students at the end.

1.3 Problem Statement

Students face difficulties in the writing component compared to reading, speaking and listening. This is an issue as writing component requires students' ability and competency in writing in English which will be able to express themselves effectively. So, students from vernacular schools face the problems of mastering their mother tongue and neglecting the acquiring of English language.

Thus, making the English language not being practiced sufficiently especially in writing component which has been stated as writing plays the vital learning tool because it helps students to understand ideas and concepts better (Voon Foo, 2007, p.4).

1.4 Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following two research questions:

1. What are the common grammatical errors that students make in writing their composition?
2. What are the measures taken to prevent students from repeating the errors while writing composition?

1.5 Significance of Study

Writing plays an important skill in learning and teaching so the difficulties faced by students needs to be addressed which is the intention of this study to make a perception about the writing problems faced by students and teachers. Hoping that such perception helps teachers adapt their teaching styles according to frequent writing errors made by students. Moreover, the study offers some measures for writing problems enabling students to overcome their difficulties in their writing tasks.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in this research analysis the errors in form one students' written English composition in a private Chinese school. It is important to know and identify the types of error committed by students as to assess in which area they are weak and needs further reinforcement, in points to excel or understood to develop profoundly in writing composition.

The reason, or cause, or source is the intervening variable because it would help us find out what/which factor influences the commission of error among students that should be considered in the way. Most researchers say that grammatical violations or semantic errors are influenced by certain factors that will be identified later in Chapter 3.

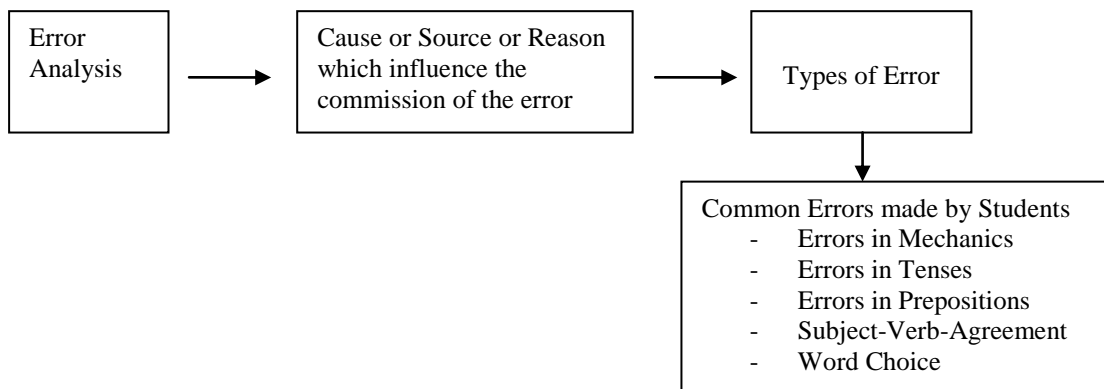


Figure 1.1: The framework illustrates the analyses of error in writing composition among form one students.

1.7 Limitations of Study

The research was limited to be aware on the error analysis on the written composition among form one students in a private Chinese school which aims to identify, describe, explain and evaluate the errors committed by the respondents on their composition so as to analyses the errors they had committed and identify the factors which cause or influence the commission of the error.

This study is limited to be conducted as the researcher sees this group of form one students three times a week for their English lessons which covers the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. Furthermore, time is another factor of constraint to carry out the research within two months. Since, the form one students are the target for this research so the research had to be carried out during normal lessons and manage the time.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

English language is commonly taught in Malaysian primary and secondary schools but standard of this language is declining among the students in the National and Independent Chinese Schools because learning this language is not easy especially to master all the four skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. At present, Malaysian schools are concentrating on the teaching and learning of the language as per the four skills. A lot of studies have been carried out by researchers like; Lim Ho Peng (1976) who claimed that students made mistakes mainly on spelling mistakes, inappropriate use of prepositions, confusing use of structural verbs, concord and tenses. Vahdatinejad (2008) stated that students make mistakes in tenses, word choices and prepositions. While James (1998) states that students tend to make mistakes in grammar. Some students tend to re-emphasise on the importance and in the process, they make many more grammatical errors. This is due to the influence of the Target Language like the subject-verb-agreement, the appropriate use of prepositions, suitable articles to be used in the context and the use of correct tense.

This problem can be solved by using the error analysis with proper corrective techniques can enable effective learning and teaching of English language to take place. It is recommended Error Analysis as the best tool for describing and explaining grammatical errors made the students by carrying out a research on students' written work. This will help teachers to recognize the importance of grammatical errors as one of the challenging areas in teaching English language.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

According to Brown (2000), in order to master the English language, learners have to be adequately exposed to all of the four basic skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. As one of the macro skills in language learning, writing is very important in man's culture as it preserved thoughts, ideas, and speech sound (Ramelan, 1992). Ulijn and Strother (1995) state that, writing is generally considered to be one of the active or productive skills of language usage. Writing is a process of producing language that comes from our thought in a written form; as according to Finnochiaro (1974), writing is a written thinking as it involves thinking process. Writing skill is seen as language skill which is most difficult and complex because it's required widely perception and involving thinking process and need good understanding on grammar and structures which extensive. Writing has become a difficult task and skill to develop that even native English speakers are making errors. Writing has always been an essential aspect of the curriculum of English as a major, and for academic purposes.

The process of writing helps develop the students' cognitive skills necessary in acquiring the learning on language (Bacha, 2002). Raimes (1983) explained that writing is an area in which students commit errors and it is helpful in students' learning because of the following reasons:

"First, it reinforces the grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary that have been taught to students. Second, when students write, they also have a chance to be adventurous with the language. Third, when they write they necessarily become very involved with the new language. The effect to express ideas and the constant use of eye, hand and brain is a unique way to reinforce learning."

2.3 Error Analysis Theories

Errors are considered to be flaws that are to be eliminated. But S. P. Corder (1967) gave a whole new point of view as he contended that errors are "important in and of themselves" as stated in his article, "The significance of learner errors". For him, analyzing errors made by language learners will determine the areas that need reinforcement.

And so, he fathered error analysis. A lot of researchers gave definition on what error analysis is. Candling (2001) considered EA as "the monitoring and analysis of learner's language". According to James (2001, p. 62), EA refers to "the study of linguistic ignorance, the investigation of what people do not know and how they attempt to cope with their ignorance". Brown (as cited in Ridhs, 2002) defined error analysis as "the process to observe, analyze, and classify the deviations of the rules of the second languages and then to reveal the systems operated by learner". "Applied error analysis, on the other hand, concerns organizing remedial courses and devising appropriate materials and teaching strategies based on the findings of theoretical error analysis" (Erdogan 2005). "EA is a type of linguistic study that focuses on the errors learners make" (Darus&Subaramaniam, 2009).

Error analysis is both advantageous to teachers and learners. According to Dullay (1986), errors can be useful feedback for the teachers. Error analysis in language teaching and learning is the study of the unacceptable forms produced by someone from learning a language, especially a foreign language (Cristal, 1999). Sercombe (2000) explains that EA serves three purposes. Firstly, to find out the level of language proficiency the learner has reached. Secondly, to obtain information about common difficulties in language learning, and thirdly, to find out how people learn a language. Corder (1967) views errors as valuable information for three beneficiaries: for teachers, it clues them on the progress of the students; for researchers, it provides evidence as to how language is acquired or learned; for learners themselves, it gives them resources in order to learn. This helps the teachers in three ways, firstly to correct their errors, secondly to improve their teaching and thirdly to focus on those area that need reinforcement (Al-haisoni, 2012).

2.4 ESL Students Common Errors in Writing Composition

According to James (1988) errors in writing such as tenses, prepositions and weak vocabulary are the most common and frequent type of errors that are committed by learners. Corder (1973) classifies errors in terms of the difference between the learner's utterance and the reconstructed version and proposes four different categories: omissions, additions, misinformation and disordering.

- Omission is considered to be the absence of an item that should appear in a well- formed utterance.
 - Addition is considered to be the presence of an item that should not appear in a well- formed utterance.
 - Misinformation is considered to be the use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure.
 - Disordering is considered to be the incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance.
- Ahmad (1986) identified these errors were: word order, verbal form, wh - question word, auxiliary replacement, redundancy, repetition of the underlined words, and irrelevant question. Darus (2009) identified the following areas in which student often commit error:
- Singular and Plural Form. Some of the participants did not know that the plural form using the suffix 's' must be applied to the countable plural noun.
 - Verb Tense. Wrong application of verb tense can be seen when the participants did not apply the correct tense to the verb in the sentences.
 - Word Choice. Participants lack appropriate vocabulary.
 - Preposition. The participants demonstrated confusion for correct usage of preposition.
 - Subject-Verb Agreement. The participants still have difficulty when it comes to the rule of subject and verb agreement.
 - Sentence Construction. Besides the above errors, participants also have problems in forming simple or complex sentences. A complete sentence should start with a subject and should be followed by a verb and an object or complete sentences. However, the participants demonstrate missing/wrong object, missing subject, and missing verb in their essays. Hendrickson (as cited in Juozolynas, 1991), provides a basis of categorization of errors. These categories of errors are: Semantics, Morphology, Syntax, Spelling and Punctuation.

- Semantic Errors

This category contains errors of meaning, such as wrong word choice, "made-up" words, and errors in pronoun reference, which in principle cannot be recognized by a syntactic parser. Sometimes it is possible to guess the intention of the author and to substitute the correct word, but often the semantic structures of the words used in the sentence are totally incompatible with each other, and it is hardly possible to interpret the author's intention.

- Syntactic Errors

In this category are eleven types of the errors of semantic origin:

1. Preposition + Required Case
2. Verb + (Required Preposition) + Required Case
3. Word Order in Main Clause
4. Subject - Verb Agreement
5. Word Order in Dependent Clause
6. Missing Parts of Sentence/Clause (Subject, Verb, or Part of Verb, Object, etc.)
7. Relative Pronoun
8. Reflexive Verb
9. Word Order in Dependent Clause with Additional Infinitive
10. Infinitive Particle
11. Adverb or Adjective with Required Case and Preposition

- Morphological Errors

In this category are errors in the inflectional morphology system of the language used.

- Punctuation Errors

Punctuation is an element of grammar and particularly the comma is likely to be a problem for English learners.

- Spelling Errors

It is also one of the common errors committed among students to misspell words especially those words which have intricate spelling and differ from its pronunciation. Richards (1971) distinguished three sources of errors: 1. Interference errors: errors resulting from the use of elements from one language while speaking/writing another, 2. Intralingua errors: errors reflecting general characteristics of the rule learning such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply, and 3. Developmental errors: errors occurring when learners attempt to build up hypothesis about the target language on the basis of limited experiences.

2.5 Related Research in Error Analysis

Cheng Feng, (2000) wrote a paper describing anew- component called writing error analysis model (WEAM) in the coca system for instructing composition of writing in Japanese as a foreign language.

He explained that it can be used for:

- (a) analyzing learners' writing error in certain types of morphological error.

(b) selecting the appropriate essays for learners' revising exercises.

Chanquoy (2001) conducted a research on "How to make it easier for children to revise their writing" to examine if a delay between writing and revising could improve the frequency and the nature of revisions. In two out of three writing sessions, the revising period was delayed to lighten the cognitive load associated with the revising process. Sixty children from 3rd to 5th grades participated in the study. In the study, Four types of errors have been distinguished: (1)-Spelling errors, which concerned errors in words. (2)-Grammar errors, which concerned gender and number, agreement of nouns, verbs and adjectives. (3)-Script errors, which were errors of writing. (4)-Punctuation errors, that consisted in a lock or error of capital letters or of any punctuation make in the text. The results showed that 3rd graders produce shorter texts, containing more errors, but revised more than 4th and 5th grader. In 3rd grader, text and grammatical errors were the most frequent type of formal error Spelling, script errors had similar percentages and punctuation errors were the rarest type of error. Grammar errors were the most common type in 4th graders. In conclusion, the researcher found that this brief review of related literature of great value and important to this study. In fact, it guided him in the process of: (1)-shedding the light on the importance of studying and analyzing errors of the written English. (b)-determines the procedures of conducting the study and (c)-providing him with insights to explain the source of the committed errors in the essays of the students of Ajloun schools. There are some previous studies on Error Analysis based on learners' written work. Such studies include Kroll and Schafer's "Error-Analysis and the Teaching of Composition", where the authors demonstrate how error analysis can be used to improve writing skills. They analyzed possible sources of error in non-native-English writers, and attempted to provide a process approach to writing where the error analysis can help achieve better writing skills. These studies, among many other researchers recognized the importance of errors in SLA and started to examine them in order to achieve a better understanding of SLA processes, i.e. of how learners acquire an L2. Another set of researchers as cited by AbiSamra (2003) also pointed out some significant results these are: Harris (1981) who analyzed sentence fragments found in student papers according to a scheme defining different categories of fragments: broken sentences and minor sentences.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This research is based on qualitative and quantitative method. This descriptive research on analyzing errors made by form one students was carried out in a Chinese private school during the first semester of 2016. It aims to answer the following research questions:-

1. What are the common grammatical errors that students make in writing their composition?
2. What are the measures taken to prevent students from repeating the errors while writing composition?

The research was conducted over a four weeks period and its objective is to analysis the errors made by the students in their written composition. Eighty minutes of the lesson was used to conduct the English lessons consist of the four components namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. The objective of the research was to collect the written composition by the students to analysis the errors made by them. The data was tabulated and it showed the grammatical errors made by the students. This research also helped to identify the areas teachers need to focus on teaching grammar components which students need to master in order to write a composition. During the mid-term test, thirty seven students sat the writing composition. They wrote a piece titled 'The Hero's Journey'. Three students were interviewed to share their difficulties, their thoughts and opinions about writing a composition in English language.

3.2 Research Design

This research is a quantitative and qualitative design which describes a problem faced by the form one students in a private Chinese school in writing a composition. Convenience sampling was taken which comprises of thirty seven students aged thirteen years old during the first semester mid-term test. The class was observed for eighty minutes over a period of one month. The subjects were engaged in the learning and writing of a composition. The independent variable in this study is the written composition in English language and the dependent variable was students' difficulties.

The data collected through writing and interview would be further discussed in the next section. Data analyzing is a process which classifies verbal data for the aim of classification, summarizing and tabulation. The collected data are being tabulated and analyzed in order to understand the errors made by the form one students in writing the composition. It also showed the students motivational level in learning English language especially in writing a composition. Responses taken from the students and teachers would be tabulated and analyzed. Figure 3.1 below shows the research design for errors analysis in form one students' written English composition in a private Chinese school.

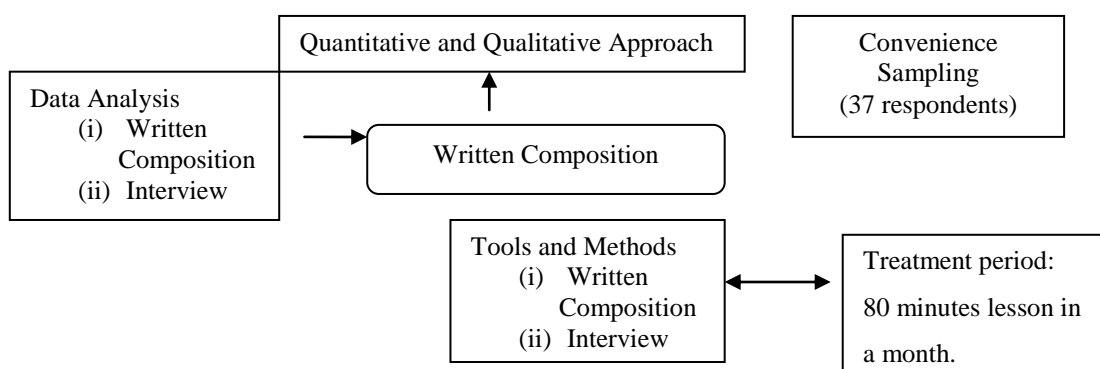


Figure 3.1: Research Design for Errors Analysis in Form One Students Written English Composition

3.3 Sampling

Convenience sampling has been selected for this descriptive research, whereby thirty seven students from form one at a private Chinese school were selected as the researcher teaches this English class. There were male and female students coming from a vernacular school background. They are being classed in accordance to their language ability and consists of mixed abilities students took part in this research by writing an essay and obtaining grade A, B and C. Their mother tongue is Chinese so they only speak in English during the lessons or when the need arises.

A person's ability in constructing a string of well-linked sentences which are grammatically and logically correct actually revealed through writing component. An essay titled 'The Hero's Journey' was written by thirty seven students who were taught how to write the essay between 150 to 200 words. The writing was based on the grammar forms being used to construct sentences. As Corder (1967) stated that students make mistakes due to inadequacy of teaching techniques and we live in an imperfect world and consequently errors will occur in spite of our best effort. Besides the influence of the students L1 the allocation of time restricts the teaching and acquiring to take place fully on all four components especially in writing as it takes the most time to guide students to practice in writing.

3.4 Location of Research

The setting for this study is at Han Chiang High School located in Georgetown area of Penang, Malaysia. It comprises of 1700 students from Junior 1 to Senior 3. The school is located at Jalan Han Chiang, Georgetown, 11600 Penang.

3.5 Instruments

The completed essays were collected and marked using the marking scheme and checked online through the software called Ginger sentence and grammar checker. This enabled the researcher to collect the required information without any biasness. The findings revealed a person's ability to construct well-linked sentences grammatically and logically. The researcher used two types of instruments as listed below:-

3.5.1 Essay Scores

Essays written by the thirty seven students were collected and analyzed. The data's were tabulated to find the scores and flaws in making errors in writing essays. The results will be used to interpret the weakness of the students in writing and teachers to overcome this problem in future. Since the study is on the error analysis students' state of mentality and thoughts were taken into consideration on how it affected them while writing the essays. This could help teachers to understand their students need better and structure their lesson plan accordingly to match the target of delivering the English language in terms of the students acquiring it effectively.

3.5.2 Interview

Interviewing was used as a tool to find out more on how the students feel when answering essay writing, how do they come to terms in writing and expressing their thoughts and they style of writing determines their ability in the English language acquisition. Teachers expressed their disappointment in seeing students unable to write and express in writing essays due to the influence of L1. Even though students are being taught how to write an essay using proper grammar tenses and suitable vocabulary but students still lack of competency in writing essays as they use English language only when the need arises and during the English class.

3.6 Data Collection

Students were taught how to write an expository essay writing during the English language lessons which runs for forty minutes for a period of six in a week. Students participate in the quiz and activities in the class prior to writing lessons. They also go through the format and requirements of four to five paragraph essay writing. During the mid-term

test, students were asked to write an essay titled ‘The Hero’s Journey’ between 150 – 200 words. The essays collected were marked using software called Ginger sentence and grammar checker. It helped the researcher to collect the required information without any biasness. The information obtained was tabulated to be analyzed and interpreted accordingly as the error analysis break-downs. Which in this study, the researcher has five different categories of Errors in Mechanics, Errors in Tenses, Errors in Prepositions, Subject-verb-agreement and word choice. Score scheme rubric was used to allocate the marks as attached in the appendices.

Face to face interviewing of three students’ was carried out during the break time as to enable students to express their thoughts without any interference. The interview questions were based on Brown (2000) whereby students have to be adequately exposed to all of the four basic skills – listening, reading, speaking and writing as follows:-

- Do you understand how to write an essay in English language?
- How do you prepare for your answers to write an essay?
- Do you use L1 to brainstorm and outline?

Two teachers were interviewed to get some information on:-

- How they feel about teaching vernacular school students who majority of them are not fluent in English?
- What are the problems faced by students to write an essay?
- How to overcome the problems and find ways to help students to write better?

The data collected from the interview is important as it strengthens the accuracy of the study and find measures to overcome the errors made by the students in writing an essay.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data collected from the written essays and interviews were analyzed to determine the common errors made by the students. Data’s were tabulated using descriptive statistics and organized in table forms to show the percentage data for the students who made errors in writing an essay by conducting a qualitative analysis and interpreted accordingly.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The research was safely conducted in the school ground and the participants participated during the English language lessons. Some students were not keen in writing the essay due to the fact that they feel intimidated by others who were capable of writing essay without any problems as they were the smart students. A few were writing the essay but could not complete it due to time management as allocated time given was sixty minutes. But these factors are considered to be mild because it can be rectified in due course. Biasness took place between the smart students and weaker students who seek the researcher’s attention to aid in their writing essays which was not encouraged as it may affect the result of the study.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Findings

The table below shows the total number of errors made by the students for each category of grammatical errors. The results were tabulated and categorized as follows:-

No.	Types of Errors	Number of errors	Percentage (%)
1.	Errors in Mechanics	10	27
2.	Errors in Tenses	8	22
3.	Errors in Prepositions	6	16
4.	Subject-Verb-Agreement	6	16
5.	Word Choice	7	19
Total number of students		37	100

Overall, the results from the research have indicated five categories of the grammatical errors took place. The percentage of the research show that five most common errors made by the students are mechanics (27%), tense (22%), prepositions (16%), subject-verb-agreement (16%) and word choice or wrong words (19%).

4.2 Research Question 1 – Essay Scores

Students list of errors are displayed and identified each sentence in a table form. The common grammatical errors that students make in writing their composition are identified as errors in mechanics, errors in tenses, errors in prepositions, improper use of subject-verb-agreement and incorrect word choice to write the composition. An explanation is given for each category.

4.2.1 Errors in Mechanics

Superman is fling to rescue the old man on the street. (flying)

Batman’s secret identity is Bruce Wayne. (Batman)

Ironman no how to create new gadgets. (know)

Students made mistakes in terms of grammar forms in different time frame. Some students are careless in spelling due to the influence of phonetics perception. Another common mistakes was on the homonym whereby students spell out the words by referring to the sound of the words as most of the words in English have the same sound but with different meanings and different spelling like 'know' with 'no', 'write' and 'right' .

Punctuation is also a major number of mistakes made by students. In terms of capitalization of proper nouns could be due to the influence from L1 interference as there is no capitalization in Chinese writings. The requirement in English language becomes an added problem in capitalization as in Bahasa Malaysia the proper nouns are capitalized. Full stop is not clearly written which is due to carelessness of the students in writing.

4.2.2 Errors in Tenses

Superman help the old woman to cross the road. (helped)
Spiderman knowed his super power and he felt excited. (knew)

Errors in tenses are the next highest among the students as they intend to mix too many tenses to be written in a body paragraph. This is due to the fact that students tend to confuse as they regard time as a separate entity by itself. As in English, the indication of time with present, past, future and continuous but Chinese and Malaysian verb itself doesn't indicate time. English verbs changes as per the aspect of time. Whereas, in Chinese and Malay the same form of verb can be used for present, past, future and continuous tense because it doesn't inflect with regard to time.

4.2.3 Word Choice

Peter Parker was beaten by the spider. (bitten)
My faavourite fictional hero is Batman, when I was small. (young)

Students know the word to use but confused with word choice such as homonym words which are spelled differently and pronunciation sounds the same. Inappropriate use of words which doesn't explained the meaning accurately especially the use of adjectives and vocabulary. Students tend to translate from their L1 into English language and that gives a different meaning all together. So, students ought to remember not to translate from their L1 into English language as it doesn't give the same meaning.

4.2.4 Errors in Preposition

Ironman was interested about inventing new gadgets for this use. (in)
Spiderman works at a news office. (in)

Students intend to make mistakes in prepositions due to the influence from L1 and Malay. This is due to the fact that in is appropriately used any situations whereas in English the prepositions 'in', 'at' are used in different situations.

4.2.5 Errors in Subject-Verb-Agreement

Captain America wear a blue suit with a white star. (wears)
Deadpool got a lot of weapon. (weapons)
Uncle Ben is killed by the bad guys. (was)

Students in a Chinese school face problems with subject-verb-agreement as they unable to differentiate the verb 'is', 'are', or 'was', 'were'. They were not able to differentiate between singular or plural noun. This indicates the influence of L1 and Malay as these two languages doesn't change according to the subject so students are not able to write with proper subject-verb-agreement form.

4.2.6 Data Analysis – Interviews

Students and teachers were interviewed on the problems faced by both group of people.

Students responded as follows:-

- they tend to become lazy, lack of interest in writing component, wandering of attention, etc. caused them to become incompetent in writing essays.
- admitted on memorizing and that doesn't help in writing so much as they tend to get confused on the time frame of the tenses.
- translating from L1 tends to ease the students to write but it doesn't reflect the meaning of the sentence structure in essay writing.

Teachers responded as follow:-

- the aim of the English language lessons based on more than one component like focusing on speaking and listening or writing and reading.
- the grammar components are taught as grammar in context.
- the emphasis is made on the overall performance and students tend to pick up quite well on one component and tend to have lack of interest in the other one.

4.3 Research Question 2 – Measures taken to Overcome

Students making errors or mistakes should be given a lot of attention especially in the writing component as this is important for students to write reports or letters in the future. Making errors or mistakes will reflect on one's performance and acquisition of the English language. Therefore, measures should be taken to overcome this problem. There are a few measures being suggested to be adhered to as to help students and teachers related to writing composition component as follows: -

4.3.1 - Motivating Students to learn grammar

Students from a Chinese education background intend to possess very little motivation and self-esteem within them to learn another language such as English language. In this case, they need to be nurtured and motivated to love to learn the language with confidence and determination. They must realise the importance of learning English language as it is an international language must be acquired to speak fluently and to write precociously.

4.3.2 Teachers teach grammar using language arts and games

Teachers must realise the importance the students rely on them to acquire the English language by telling them especially the grammar forms. By doing so, students will be focused on learning the language. Therefore, teachers must teach students incorporating language arts and games to teach in a fun and easier way to acquire the grammar forms without difficulties. As students love language arts and games in learning English language as it is very stimulating and enhancing their four skills all at one time.

4.3.3 – Correction and Improvement

Students should do corrections as it addresses the errors or mistakes made by them in writing as correcting the pre-theoretical sense of the grammar of the target language tends to let students realise the errors made and take into consideration of not repeating the same error. Make improvement one step at a time as it is a process to bring the composition to a higher level like violating of rhetorical principles, ill-formedness in meaning, violations of logic, poor use of words, defects in style, etc. will be corrected and tended to. By doing correction and improvement, attention is given to the context whereby the corrected or improved expressions take place.

4.3.4 – Classification of Errors

Students tend to make mistakes in more than one category of grammar mistakes. So by classifying the errors into different classes helps the students to see the difference between one grammar form to another as they tend to overlap at times. So it is advisable for teachers to classify the errors into sub- or sub-sub categories in hierarchical structure under major headings appropriately is an added advantage to ease teaching this group of students coming from vernacular school whereby English is their second language.

5. FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Conclusion of the Findings

In general the study has shown the difficulties faced by the students in writing and the grammatical errors made by them which should have a high percentage in mechanics, tenses, wrong word choice, prepositions and subject-verb-agreement. Students tend to translate when writing due to the influence of L1 and Malay. They get confused whether the correct form of grammar is as the same as the L1 and Malay. When this takes place, students make mistakes in writing component. Expressing themselves in second language is not easy as the interference from L1 is constantly taking place within them.

Memorizing tends to help the students to remember the grammar forms but failed to apply it into writing component as different situations or genres of writing are given to them to write. Here, they tend to mix the tenses up and ended up with too many tenses in a paragraph, this contradicts the message conveyed in the paragraph.

Teachers are more focused on completing the syllabus and intend to forget the problems faced by their students. Thus, the problems do not stop there with one grammar form but it rolled on to another and students face the difficulties of learning too many grammar forms and not knowing which one is suitable to use. For example, writing a story should be using past tense but students intend to use present simple instead.

5.2 Recommendations

As per the result, a few recommendations are being proposed. First of all, the motivations of the students need to be nurtured towards learning the English language. Realise the importance of the language as an international language is being spoken by everyone. Speaking is not enough as writing will determine the person's fluency in the language.

Teachers play an important role in imparting the knowledge so teachers ought to use a variety of creative ways to teach their students. For example incorporating language arts or games in teaching the grammar as students tend to be more focused and able to learn fast and understand the context. Writing component can be a boring one to do but by incorporating it into fun-filled activities ensure the students' state of mind to be positive and cognitive learning takes place.

As Brown (1980) states, once a student has learned to acquire parts of the new system, more and more

Intralingua transfer generalization within L2 would occur. Therefore, students should be encouraged to do corrections as it helps to overcome their mistakes and learn accordingly on how to apply the grammar in writing. Improvements should be introduced as to bring the students level to a higher one and made known to them that as they learn, they progress from one stage to another and that gives them the pride and motivation to learn and write better.

Mitchell and Myles (2004) claims that errors if studied could reveal a developing system of the students L2 language and this system is dynamic and open to changes and resetting of parameters. This view is supported by Start (2001: 19) in his study, which also explained that the teachers need to view students' errors positively and should not regard them as the learners' failure to grasp the rules and structures but view the errors as process of learning. He subscribes to the view that errors are normal and inevitable features of learning. He added that errors are essential condition of learning. Therefore, teachers should identify the errors made by their students and classify them into class as at times some grammars tend to overlap each other. Confusing students on which one is the correct one. By pointing out and teaching them as a whole class of students need enhance the teaching and learning progress to take place smoothly.

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