Lexical Analysis of Malay Language Orthographic Errors in the Writing of Foreign Students

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INTRODUCTION

In conjunction with the demands of the development of the global world, people are free to pursue their studies in the country of their desire. According to the final report from the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia in October 2009 (Final Report of the National Higher Education Research Institute - IPPTN, 2009), generally students choose to study abroad because they want to gain experience, and be exposed to a new education system and culture. Among these countries is Malaysia which has interesting elements to offer that would allow it to become a leader of higher education in the Asia-Pacific region. In order to improve the quality of education that is Malaysian-context oriented, the National Language (B) which emphasizes more on the aspects of language for communication, and the method of using simple language such as pronunciation and intonation, spelling system, oral communication and written communication as well as understanding general statements, has been offered to foreign students at the university. The goal is not only to help foreign students in their use of the Malay language in their daily life activities, but also to help them when making references to academic materials in the Malay language. However, the current problem is the frequency of errors made by the foreign students which has affected the performance of the students in their process of mastering the Malay language. Errors in learning the Malay language occur not only among Malaysian students, but are even more common among foreign students. This phenomenon has impeded the process of mastering the Malay language as a target language, especially after a pilot study among 79 foreign students was conducted by the researcher. Due to the lack of information about the areas of the students' difficulties, it is difficult for the teaching staff to predict the errors of the foreign students who come from all over the world, and this has burdened the teaching staff in their tasks of planning a more effective teaching and learning session. As a result, the lack of information in terms of the areas of these errors will also hinder the proposal of strategies to learn the new language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Through literature review, many studies have shown that students have difficulty with orthographic errors when mastering word formation in the second language (Kholood and Norbert, 2012; Norehan, 2009; Suthanthiradevi, 1996; Sandra Love Field, 2003). Students often transfer the elements of their native language in the process of lexical mastery of a second language. According to the study by Kholood and Norbert (2012), the manner of English vowel pronunciation among Arabic speakers was found to be influenced by short vowels and long vowels of their native language. This phenomenon resulted in them having difficulty in spelling and lexical mastery of the English language. Thus, orthographic errors of vowel substitution with other letters are often detected among Arab speakers in the process of learning Eng-

lish. So, the different elements of the native language and foreign language will create difficulties in their learning process. In contrast, learners of a second language or foreign language will be able to accept easily elements of a foreign language that are similar or almost the same as their native language (Brown, 2000).

In the Malaysian context, the multi-racial students also experience different difficulties when learning the Malay language. For example, Norehan (2009), in her study carried out error analysis of Orang Asli's (indigenous people) essays. The findings of this study indicate that there are influences from the mother tongue and the colloquial language detected in the aspect of spelling. This phenomenon was detected because of the incorrect way of pronouncing words in the Malay language that influenced the word to be misspelt according to the pronunciation (oral). An example is as the dropping of the letter / u /, in 'kucing-kacing' and 'suka-saka'. The weakness is apparent in the aspect of spelling.

Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin (2004) examined the performance of the Malay language subject mastery by Malay students at the UPSR and PMR level in the era of globalization. Their study focused on measuring the performance of Malay students but non-Malay students were taken as samples so that the results of the study is more representative. Based on the results of their study, it was found that the decline in the student's performance was detected to be closely related with the form of questions presented and are identified as problematic questions. In addition, the findings of this study also made it apparent that problematic questions will confuse students because the questions are based on reference grammar but is contrary to the practised grammar. Practised grammar is the grammar that is used by the general public daily that is disseminated by the media as a result of globalisation.

Additionally, previous studies have listed some problems in language learning due to the influence of the mother tongue and foreign language. The difficulties of the Chinese students in learning the Malay language is in the spelling process where they often change the letter 'r' with the letter 'l'. An example is 'lari' becomes 'lali' (Medan Sandra Kasih, 2003). In contrast, for Indian students, the process of replacing the Malay language vowel phonemes often occurs in composition writing. The view of the study was that the substitution of the vowel phonemes from Tamil to Malay is such as the substitution of /e/ to /a/, /a/ to /o/, /e/ to /i/, /u/ to /o/ and /i/ to /e/ (Suthanthiradevi, 2004). Errors made by the students give us a more detailed picture of the process of language learning. Therefore, errors are now regarded as a very important vehicle for diagnostic purposes in language teaching (Khazriyati Salahuddin, Tan, and Marlyna Maros, 2006).

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted at a private institution of higher learning in Malaysia. The sample consisted of 114 foreign students originating from 21 countries. They had followed the National Language B (Malay language) class for fourteen weeks at the university. Among the study sample, the Malay language is a foreign language after their mother tongue and English. The medium or element of teaching among the study sample in the classroom is English. Writing tests and observations were used in the data collection process. The researcher was also allowed to carry out observations while the teacher was teaching in the classroom. Two sessions were provided and the duration of each session was for two hours. The contrastive analysis approach and error analysis were applied in the foreign students' essay papers. Error analysis is a theory of language teaching and learning founded by Corder (1974) while contrastive analysis that is aimed theoretically at predicting the difficulty of the Malay language lexical aspect will be tested its hypothesis with error analysis through a writing test among the foreign students who follow the subject of National Language B. This error analysis study is limited to the basic lexical errors in learning the Malay language among students who are not native speakers. The foreign students were required to answer written test questions and they were given one hour to do so. To avoid problems of plagiarism during the running of the test, the teacher prepared three sets of test papers containing the same questions but arranged randomly. Based on the writing test papers distributed, data were collected and analyzed in order to fulfil the research objective. Data were collected and analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The basic lexical elements tested included ten aspects of language, namely colours, family members, expressions of basic information, day, time / period, basic numbers, personal pronouns, greetings, question words, and vocabulary.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Objective: To analyze the lexical orthographic errors and classify the types of errors made by foreign students in learning the Malay language.

In this study, the basic lexical elements tested covered ten aspects of language, namely colours (5 questions), family members (5 questions), expressions of basic information (9 questions), day (5 questions), time / period (5 questions), basic numbers (6 questions), personal pronouns (5 questions), greetings (7 questions), question words (10 questions), and vocabulary (12 questions). Chart 1 below shows the frequency total of the basic lexical errors that was detected according to the 10 aspects of language.

Chart 1: The Frequency Total of the Basic Lexical Errors According to the Malay Language Aspects

According to Chart 1, a total of 814 cases of basic lexical errors were identified. In this study, it was found that the foreign students made the most mistakes in the aspect of basic numbers which was 106 times, followed by the aspect of time / period and question words where the frequency reached 97 and 96 times respectively. Contrastingly, the aspect of colour in the Malay language was the aspect with the least number of mistakes, which was 48 times. Comparatively, the findings of this study are similar to the findings obtained in the learning of English as a second language in Malaysia. In the study by Su-Hie Ting, the frequency of errors in the aspect of preposition in English was ranked the highest; however, this aspect was not included in the writing test paper of this study. Nevertheless, question words which was placed in the second position in the list of errors from Su-Hie Ting's study is similar with this study (the frequency for the second and third place in this study differed in only one error only).

The aspect of basic numbers was the error with the highest frequency total. Based on the findings, it was found that the students often made errors such as changing the vowel words with other vowel words or consonants word with other consonants. It was found that the foreign students preferred to use the numerals in number form when writing. Through the observation of the oral activities in the classroom, it was found that the students always say the Malay language basic numbers in English during the oral activities. A few students were less fluent in their pronunciation of the numerals. As an example, a student from China had said the number eight 'lapan' as 'lapang' while the number 19 will take some time as they would say each syllable for the number as in 'sem_bi_lan be_las'. Clearly, the main cause is the lack of application and exercises on the basic numbers in the Malay language, resulting in them making errors in spelling.
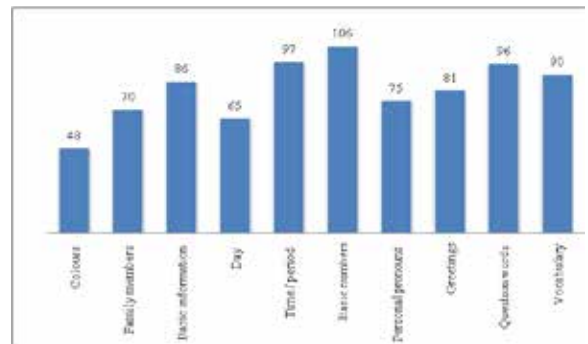
In contrast, the Malay language aspect with the least number of errors was colour. The frequency of errors in the aspect of colour (48 times), day (65 times) and family members (70) were the lowest. This is because memory was tested in three parts in the writing test paper. Students must apply the translation method, namely translating the three aspects of the words from English to Malay.

Subsequently, the researcher concluded the frequency of errors in the Malay language aspects into tables, followed by a detailed analysis for each level of basic lexical mastery in learning the Malay language. The data of the basic lexical errors collected were then classified into five categories as listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Five Categories of Malay Language Basic Lexical Errors

I	II	III	IV	V
Intralinguistic Errors			Interlinguistic Errors	Language Influence L1/L2
Phoneme	Morphology	Words/Phrases	Semantics	L1/L2
Substitution of Consonants	Affixes	Substitution of Words	Did not understand	English
Substitution of Vowels		Addition of Words	Did not answer	Indonesian Language
Addition of Consonants		Omission of Words		
Addition of Vowels		Inversion of Words		
Omission of Consonants		Linking of Words		
Omission of Vowels		Creation of Words		
Inversion of Letters				

Redundancy of Words

Referring to Table 1, the first category is phonemic orthographic errors, second is the morphological errors, and third is the word/phrase errors. The three categories are the errors detected in the spelling process or word pattern selection that is not acceptable in the Malay language or named as 'word redundancy '. These errors are also named as intralingual errors which are caused by the target language itself (BM) and are 'developmental' in nature. According to the Error Analysis theory (Corder, 1974), all errors cannot be predicted but intralingual factors are among the factors that contributed to the errors made by students. In this study, the researcher has listed the differences and similarities of errors through comparison with the target language. For Category I, the phonemic orthographic errors include seven subcategories, namely substitution of consonants, substitution of vowels, addition of vowels, addition of consonants, omission of consonants, omission of vowels and inversion of letters. In Category II, the morphological errors that can be detected are errors in the use of affixes. The errors in Category III, namely words / phrases include six subcategories which are substitution of words, addition of words, omission of words, inversion of words, linking of words and creation of words that are not accepted in the Malay language.

Apart from intralingual errors, interlingual errors were also detected. Types of interlingual errors at the semantic level are divided into two levels of understanding. The researcher has named the two subcategories as 'did not understand' and 'did not answer'. The first subcategory of errors in semantics occurred due to the foreign students' learning method that is wrong or not comprehensive that they gave ungrammatical answers. The second subcategory is students did not answer the questions posed as a result of limited understanding. In addition to the influence of the mother tongue, the influence of the second language was also detected through the Malay language errors among the foreign students. The researcher has summarised the type of frequency of errors made by the students in the form of percentages. The total frequency distribution of the basic lexical errors in five categories is reported in detail in Chart 2.

Based on the results of the analysis that was carried out, there are a total of 18 subcategories of errors that have been identified. Based on Chart 2, it was found that the category of semantic error is the error most committed by students, which is 51.2%. Students who did not master the lexical meaning will experience hurdles when answering the writing test questions. This level of understanding is divided into two levels, namely understanding that is not comprehensive or the students did not understand at all the context of the question. In the process of finishing the test within the time specified, it is also likely that they did not have the time to check their writing. In addition, factor of not remembering, lack of effective practice and emotional distractions are also likely to affect the performance of the students. In the scoring, deduction of marks was not only done in the areas of errors, but even mistakes in the answers provided or blanks in the answer space would also affect their scores.

In terms of basic lexical mastery in the Malay language, students were also identified as weak in mastering the use of words or phrases. This is illustrated by the percentage of word/phrase errors which was the second highest in the error category, reaching 29%. In this category of error, students had the tendency to commit errors by substituting words with other words (47%), omitting words (30%) or creating words (20%) which are not accepted in the Malay language that they form ungrammatical grammar. There was also the likelihood that they were careless or lackadaisical when writing.

In addition, phonemic errors (12.7%) were also recorded. The researcher has categorized the types of lexical orthographic errors into seven subcategories. It was found that the substitution of vowels to another vowel is the error most commonly

committed which is 45% of the total percentage of phonemic errors. Phonemic errors were the second highest in its percentage followed by consonant omission errors (25%). These orthographic errors will be shown in detail in the section on category of errors according to demographics.

Chart 2: Frequency Distribution of Basic Lexical Errors (%)
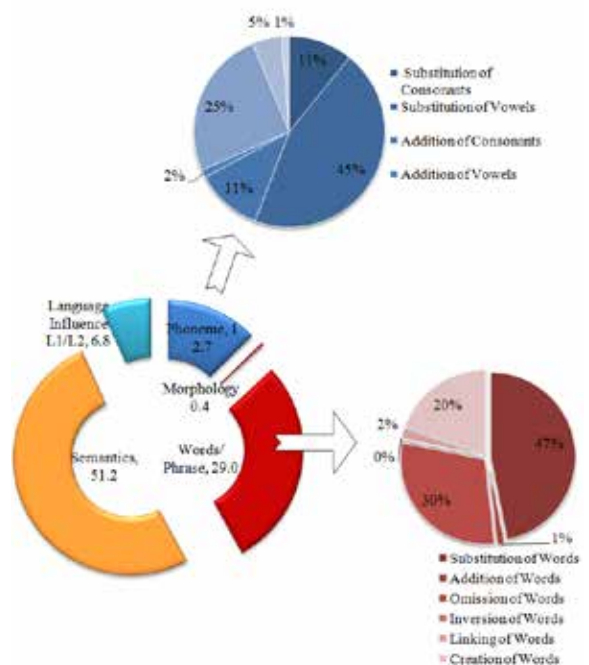
It should also be mentioned that the influence of the mother tongue and second language (6.8%) were also detected. The findings of this study are consistent with the Error Analysis theory that is of the opinion that the mother tongue is one source of errors, but the mother tongue is not the only reason for errors. Clearly, in the context of learning the Malay language as a foreign language in this study, the second language, namely the English language is also an influence in the learning of the Malay language. There are English words that have not been fully absorbed into the Malay language because of the desire to maintain the original form. This leads to a disambiguation for students because they confuse between fully absorbed word and partly absorbed in terms of their pronunciation and spelling in the Malay language. Examples are the word 'protein' that has not been fully absorbed into the Malay language because of the absence of a suitable match or the desire to maintain the international usage nature and the word 'Disember' has been fully absorbed and spelt based on its visual form. As a result, foreign students will apply the first and second method when spelling the word 'Disember' following the English language, namely 'December' or 'Dicember'. Therefore, the structure of the foreign students' mother tongue that is different from the structure of the target language (the Malay language) will result in the process of mastering the Malay language be influenced by the second language, namely English that functions as the medium of learning of the target language. Amongst all the lexical errors, the morphology of the Malay language is the part that is the easiest to be mastered by the foreign students because its error was only 0.4%. This is because the exposure to affixes in learning the Malay language is still at the basic level in the Malay language syllabus.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the discovery of these errors is a sign that students of different races require different emphasis or guidance. Thus, the role of the language teacher is very important. The use of reinforcement elements such as praises and prizes while teaching Malay to increase the students' motiva-

tion in terms of speech with the teachers, classmates, or society is strongly encouraged. In addition, preparation of methods, materials and activities that attracts interest and improve students' positive attitude should also be emphasized. The findings and the recommendations proposed are important especially for future instructors who will be involved in the teaching of Malay as a foreign language

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