

## **INFLUENCE OF MALAY LANGUAGE ON SOME UUM STUDENTS' USE OF ENGLISH: A STUDY OF ERRORS AND FACILITATION**

### **Introduction**

Many errors that learners of second language make are predictable or even expected. This is a feature of interlanguage. The term interlanguage was coined by the American linguist, Larry Selinker, in recognition of the fact that second language learners (L2) construct a linguistic system that draws, in part on the learner's first language (L1) and from the target language. A learner's interlanguage is, therefore, a unique linguistic system, thus, no matter how often students are corrected in some aspects of language, they will not get it right until they are cognitively ready.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Mother tongue is said to have a significant influence over the success and the failure in the acquisition and production of the target language. It is proposed that language transfer does not only cause error but also facilitates success, which leads to avoidance or even generate overuse of certain linguistic features that could be observed in the interlanguage.

This interlanguage can be observed in both students' oral and written works. This paper was undertaken to examine the English essays written by 90 Malay speaking students taking English courses in UUM. The analysis aims at discovering the presence of the three manifestations commonly associated with L1 influence in interlanguage. They are negative transfer (error), positive transfer (facilitation) and overuse. Instances of these manifestations will be presented and the reasons for such occurrences will be discussed through the use of some illustrations taken from the essays.

### **Literature Review**

Carson and Kuehn (1994) stated that transfer of L1 skills to L2 learning can materialise more easily if the L2 skills are present in L1. This is similar to Littlewood's (1984) proposition that beginning level L2 learners tends to exhibit more negative errors compared to the intermediate ones. This is due to the amount of L2 exposure the students have experienced.

Littlewood (1984) has suggested that when some forms of transfer produced by the students particularly at some basic level have been identified, the students would not have to start learning from zero and teachers would know areas that need emphasis. Teaching can be assisted through

the understanding of the interlanguage of the learners. Understanding L1 transfer would enable teachers to perform more effective teaching by taking into accounts the cultural and linguistics differences, thus acknowledging the practicality of the understanding of transfer (Odlin, 1989).

Taylor (1974) stressed that whether it is written or spoken form of linguistic production, transfer can always be tested and identified. He conducted a research in order to investigate elementary and proficient students' transfer by means of test on language translation. In this study, he employed 20 Latin American Spanish students enrolling for a 15 week intensive course in English at the English Language Institute at the University of Michigan as the research subjects (10 subjects in elementary group and 10 in the proficient group), he collected the data using a written translation of sentences from Spanish to English.

Jiang and Kuehn (2001) who proposed that transfer strategies can be taught by teachers, investigated the transfer exhibited by low-intermediate ESL students enrolled in an academic English development course at a community college level. In the study, they wanted to know whether L1 proficiency influences the rate of L2 vocabulary development and also the role of transfer in such development.

### **Research questions**

The research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the manifestations that influence the second language acquisition among Malay speaking students in UUM?
2. How do these manifestations facilitate second language acquisition?

### **Methodology**

This study will be fully descriptive for the researchers aim at identifying the manifestations that influence the second language acquisition among the Malay students in UUM.

#### **i) Subjects**

A total of 90 Malay speaking students participated in this study ranging from beginning to intermediate levels of proficiency. They were registered in the following English courses:

- 1) Communication 1 (BLE1012)
- 2) Communication II (BLE 1022)
- 3) English for Higher Education (BLE2012)

## ii) Procedure

For the purpose of data collection, all subjects were engaged in free writing on topics given by respective researchers. Even though the subjects were of the researchers own classes from their own institution, the subjects would be completely informed concerning the nature of the study. The essay writing was done in the classroom. Once the subjects have completed the task, the researchers collected the data and later analysed them.

## Significant of the study

It is hoped that the findings of the study would;

1. provide an insight into the underlying issues that affect students' performance in their second language acquisition.
2. offer language teachers an insight on the teaching strategies to help students better acquire the second language.

## Limitation of the study

Due to time constraints, the study is confined to only one class of the three different courses mentioned earlier on. Therefore, it is only safe to generalise the results of the study to only students taking these three particular courses.

## Findings and Discussions

### a) Negative transfer (error)

From the samples of writing analysed, it was found that many errors occurred as a result of the negative transfer of mother tongue patterns into the learners' L2.

Firstly, it was evident the learner failed to use *plural -s form* correctly.

In this case, in the L2, 's' is added to the regular noun to show the plurality of the noun whereas in B. Melayu, this does not happen as exemplified below;

• L2- A <b>car</b> (singular form)
• L1- sebuah <b>kereta</b> (singular form)
• L2 – Two <b>cars</b> (plural form)
• L1 - Dua buah <b>kereta</b> (plural form)

This has resulted in errors of omission.

A second type of error resulting from negative transfer is in the usage of the *-ed past*. In the L2, 'ed' is added to the regular verb to show events that had happened in the past whereas in B. Melayu, this does not occur as exemplified below;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• L2- My mother <b>cooks</b> rice. (Present Tense)</li><li>• L1- Emak saya <b>masak</b> nasi. (Present Tense)</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• L2 - My mother <b>cooked</b> the rice just now. (Past Tense)</li><li>• L1 -Emak saya telah <b>masak</b> nasi sebentar tadi. (Past Tense)</li></ul>

Next, errors are also found in the use of possessive pronoun. The apostrophe ('s) form to indicate that something belongs or connects to someone or something have been left out because the students have incorrectly assumed a hypothesis that would be appropriate for their L1 but not for the target language (English). In Malay language, there is an absence of apostrophe, that is, in the language we only mention " nama bapa saya ialah..", "nama kucing saya ialah..", "rumah Siddiq" and so forth as exemplified below:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• L2 - <b>My father name / mother name</b></li><li>• L1 - Nama bapa saya</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• L2 - <b>Siddiq house</b></li><li>• L1 - Rumah Siddiq</li></ul>

Next, L1 negative transfer can be observed in the use of comparative adjective forms that require two-word form.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• L2 - They can speak <b>more better</b></li><li>• L1 - <b>Mereka boleh bertutur dengan lebih baik</b></li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• L2 - She is <b>more clever</b> than her friend</li><li>• L1 - Dia lebih pandai daripada rakannya</li></ul>

In English, to compare two or more things, the adjective is inflected, for example clever becomes cleverer, high becomes higher and so forth. Since these features are absent in their L1 they resort to their interlanguage to construct the comparative form as illustrated above.

Finally, negative transfer also occurs when the subjects try to use adjective in their writings. The errors are evident when the subjects transfer their L1 properties into the L2. In English, the adjective is placed before the noun, instead of 'hall badminton', it should be 'badminton hall'. However, in their L1, the adjective is placed after the noun, for instance:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• L1 – gelanggang badminton</li><li>• L2 – hall badminton</li></ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• L1 – stem lama</li><li>• L2 – stamp old</li></ul>                 |

### b) Positive transfer (facilitation)

As for the positive transfer (facilitation), according to Odlin (1989), facilitation is evident not so much in the total absence of certain errors but rather in a reduced number of errors and also in the rate of learning. Furthermore, he says that the facilitative effects can be best obtained through the longitudinal study of individual learners of different native languages, which are later studied, and learner comparisons are carried out.

One of the linguistic features that are somewhat similar between the L1 and L2 is the use of preposition 'at' with time.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• L2- I arrived <b>at</b> 8.00am</li><li>• L1- Saya sampai <b>pada</b> pukul 8 pagi.</li></ul> |
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The next evidence of positive transfer is found in a sentence containing a modal auxiliary verb. Again, the reason is that it does not require any use of markers. Structure is similar to Malay. S + V (aux +verb) + O (complement). The modal auxiliary also has its equivalent in English.

1. They **can improve** their English.
2. English **can make** my future...
3. I think I **can increase** my vocabulary and **can speak**...

The next instance of facilitation observed in the subjects' writing is the use of adverbs. Subjects are able to write correct statements using the adverbs especially adverbs of frequency. They are able to use it in the initial position and the middle position.

1. My mom **always** tell me...
2. **Sometimes**, I feel embarrassed to speak in English because I **always** think that my English is not good.

Besides that, it is discovered that the Malay learners allow pronoun retention of 'me'. They are more likely to construct correct sentences such as:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• L2 - From this websites, I found a lot of questions to help <u>me</u> in exam</li><li>• L1 - ..... <u>bantu saya</u></li></ul> |
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*Rasidah bt Mat Zin*  
*Majdah bt Chulan*  
*Badrul Hisham Ahmad*

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• L2 – He always advise <u>me</u> to study hard</li><li>• L1 - ..... <u>menasihati saya</u></li></ul> |
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The sentences above can be considered as grammatically correct, since the learners might not face problems in using pronoun 'me' in their sentences as they resemble their L1. In Bahasa Melayu, 'tolong beri saya' resembles in English if the person says 'please give me'. Hence, it facilitates the correct use of pronoun 'me' in their sentences.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, enlightened by the findings of this work, it is proven that L1 has an influence on the second language acquisition. It can be observed through the two manifestations, commonly associated with L1 influence in interlanguage. These manifestations would not only hinder learning but also facilitate the second language acquisition. Therefore, it is very important for educators to understand this phenomenon to enable them to perform more effective teaching and help students to better acquire the second language.