BORANG PENGESAHAN STATUS TESIS

JUDUL: AN ANALYSIS ON SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT ERROR - A CASE STUDY AT
SEKOLAH MENENGAH KEBANGSAAN BANDAR BARU UDA
JOHOR BAHRU

SESAN PENGAJIAN: 1999 – 2003

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A CASE STUDY AT SEKOLAH MENENGAH KEBANGSAAN
BANDAR BARU UDA, JOHOR BAHRU

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This project report is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for
the award of the degree of Bachelor of Science and Education (TESL)

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OCTOBER, 2003
"I admit that this project report is my own piece of work except for citations and summaries whereby each and everyone of their sources has been duly acknowledged."

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Bismillahirrahmanirrahim….

With the name of Allah The Almighty; He who has given me the strength and will to carry on.....

A heart full of gratitude and appreciation especially to:

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the research was to identify the subject verb agreement errors in the students’ descriptive writing. This study discussed the reasons for the production of subject-verb agreement errors in students’ writing. The pedagogical implications from the study are also discussed. A total of 34 samples of the students’ writing were collected from Form 3 Bestari 3 students of Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Bandar Baru Uda, Johor Bahru. The frequency of errors was identified through the analysis of students’ descriptive writing. The findings of the study showed that the students produced error in subject verb agreement in their descriptive writing. From the findings of the study, the researcher summarized that the errors produced by the students in their descriptive writing were due to L1 interference whereby the students transferred and translated their L1 into L2. Other reason for the error production was slips whereby the students could not apply the rule of subject-verb agreement appropriately in their writing. Results of this study showed that the students selected in this study still need more instruction and practice in using subject-verb agreement in writing.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the introduction, the background of the problem and statement of the problem. Objectives and research questions are also presented in this chapter. This chapter also presents the significance of the study, the scope of the study and the definition of term.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

English is now widely used in Malaysia. Its position now has become the second language among Malaysians. English is given the position of second language in terms of its importance in the education system and international
relations. Therefore, English has to be taught effectively in schools. Every Malaysian who has undergone the national education system will have the proficiency in English which enable them to communicate in the language (Asmah Haji Omar, 1987). English is taught within the four language skills namely listening, reading, speaking and writing whereby students are engaged in a variety of classroom activities. This is to ensure that students can use and exploit the language in their daily lives. Besides that, the teaching of English at schools gives students a chance to get prepared for future job situations so that they can engage meaningfully in local and international affairs (Huraian Sukatan Pelajaran, 1990).

English as a second language causes many problems among students in Malaysia. Students find that learning English is difficult due to its nature of a complex language system (Baharuddin Abu Kassim, 1970). In second language learning, learners are engaged actively to discover the rules of the language they are learning. The acquisition of second language differs from one person to another. Thus the learners have to build their own attitude towards the new language (Hudelson, 1989). Learners can create the rules of a new language when they participate actively in the learning process and also through ongoing experience (Ellis, 1985).
Learners also produce errors in second language acquisition. However, Ellis (1985) realized errors as part of second language acquisition and it should not be taken seriously. He added that errors are a natural norm which occurred to learners in acquiring second language. Thus, the acquisition of second language differs from one person to another.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

People tend to commit errors in the process of learning a new or foreign language. Errors show the strategies that learners use in developing their second language acquisition. Errors should not be viewed as a negative sign but it is actually a positive sign that learning is taking place. Lightbown and Spada (1999), defined errors as an attempt that learners use to discover the language that they learn. Ellis (1985) also shared the same view with Strevens and Lightbown and Spada in defining an error. Ellis (1985) sees an error as a natural and essential part of second language learning. Therefore, it is clear that error is a natural norm that occurred in the process of second language learning. It indicates the strategies and attempts that learners use in order to acquire a language.
Jain (1974) stated that learners’ errors are important for the understanding of second language acquisition process. A learner’s errors are used as a tool to improve the teaching of a language. It is because a learner’s errors would help teachers to plan a suitable teaching method which focuses on the four language skills. So that second language learners can acquire the skills and enhance their language acquisition.

In relation to errors, researchers always use error analysis as a method of identifying weaknesses in second language learning. In behaviourist theory of language learning, errors are signs that a language learner had simply not learned the rules of the target language effectively (Ellis, 1985). Through error analysis, teachers can recognize students’ language development. Thus teachers can assist instructions to students in order to enhance and improve their language acquisition (Bartholomae, 1980).

Twenty-five years ago, teachers of English as a second language (ESL) found that teaching writing was a difficult task and it was hard for students too to master the skill (Hudelson, 1989). With regard to the teaching of writing, the teachers
received the following advice which persuaded teachers to develop the writing skill step by step.

“Don’t worry about teaching writing until the children have mastered the oral language. Teach children to understand and speak English first. Language develops sequentially from listening to speaking to reading, and finally to writing. Writing is the last of the language processes to develop, and it is the last of the language processes to be taught. Elementary ESL educators should focus on developing children’s speaking vocabularies and not concentrate on literacy”.
(Hudelson, 1989:1)

From the above statement, it is clear that writing skill is a difficult task to acquire compared to other skills of listening, reading and speaking. Thus teachers always worry about teaching writing to students. The most important thing in the learning of English is to make students able to understand the language and use the language in communication. Writing normally develops after the students acquire the receptive skills of listening and speaking. So it is good for teachers to plan their lesson properly so that students can master all the four skills effectively.

Writing is commonly a difficult activity for most people. This is due to the nature of writing, which has to be learnt through a process of instruction (Byrne, 1983). In order to acquire writing skill, ones should learn certain structures, which are important for effective communication. A writer also has to learn the written form of the language and learn how to organize the ideas properly. It is important for
the writer to organize the ideas properly so that the reader can understand what the
writer has written. Myles (2002) also agreed that writing skill is not an easy skill to
acquire. Thus it needs to be practiced and learned through experience. The writer
should have enough practice and experience in order to acquire good writing skill.
Further more, writing skill needs to be improved from time to time with constant
effort from the writer.

The students chosen as the subjects in this study were known as second
language learners because they learned English as a second language at school. In
learning English as a second language, the students were exposed to the four
language skills which would develop their proficiency in English language. Students
tend to produce errors in spite of their best effort and attempt to use and master
English. However the researcher believes that errors can be decreased or eliminated
when there is an attempt to identify and remedy the errors. One way to identify the
errors made by the students is through an analysis of students’ writing. The analysis
of students’ writing would reveal the difficulties faced by the students in the learning
process. From the analysis, teachers especially could take effective steps to
overcome the students’ weaknesses and further enhance the students’ second
language acquisition.
1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The major problem faced by language learners in learning English as a second language is acquiring the language. Students in Malaysia realize the difficulties they are having in acquiring the language. The reason why they are having difficulties in learning English is because they are not exposed to the environment and situations, which encourage and require them to use English as a medium of interaction. Most students use their native languages in their communication for example Bahasa Melayu, Tamil, Mandarin and many more.

In addition, the learning environment also does not promote the use of English language. The main language in school is Bahasa Malaysia and almost all subjects are delivered in Bahasa Malaysia. As a result, students will face problems in acquiring English. Without enough exposure and practice of the language, students will become weaker in the language performance. They tend to have problems in learning the language particularly in speaking and writing. Thus it prevents the students to have good speaking and writing skills. This is supported by Myles (2002) who noted that writing is not a naturally acquired skill but in order to acquire it, students should learn and practice it through experience. Therefore, students need ample and continuous practice and exposure in English language in order to master the writing skills. This is because writing is not an easy skill to master and it needs a
lot of practice. Through enough practice and experience, students will be able to write accurately.

As for students of Form 3 Bestari 3 of Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Bandar Baru Uda Johor Bahru, they are also facing the same situation where English is not fully utilized as a language for communication. The students preferred to use Bahasa Malaysia in their daily activities with their friends. Majority of the students in the school was Malay and obviously Bahasa Malaysia was widely used in the school. This situation would decrease students’ motivation to use English in their daily activities. It would also affect the students’ performance in English particularly in writing because they did not have enough exposure and practice in the language.

Writing is one of the skills that are being taught in school. Writing is also a component to be evaluated in tests and examination. In writing test or examination, students should be able to write accurately in order to obtain good marks. As for Form 3 Bestari 3 students, they should have a good writing skill because they were going to sit for Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) in October 2003. The English paper in PMR consists of two papers. Paper one consists of comprehension questions and paper two consists of writing. In paper two, students are required to write essays
on titles given. Therefore, it would be an advantage if the students can write an essay with lesser production of errors.

Writing is actually a means to test students’ language ability. Writing will present or determine students’ ability to write in the target language. When students write in second language, they tend to produce texts that contain grammatical and rhetorical errors (Myles, 2002). It is because the second language writers are not able to express what they want to say in a written form. Therefore, there are some possibilities that students may produce error in writing. By having this in mind, this study intended to identify the errors produced by the students in descriptive writing. This study identified the subject-verb agreement error produced by the students in writing and discussed the reasons underlying the production of the errors in students’ writing.
1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study were:

1. to identify the subject-verb agreement error in students’ writing.
2. to state the reasons for the production of subject-verb agreement errors in students’ writing.
3. to discuss pedagogical implications that can be derived from the error analysis.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.4.1. Did students produce subject-verb agreement errors in their writing?
1.4.2. What were the reasons for the production of subject-verb agreement errors in students’ writing?
1.4.3. What were the pedagogical implications that can be derived from the analysis of subject-verb agreement error in students’ writing?