

ERROR ANALYSIS IN ESL WRITING

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Abstract

English is a globally recognised language spoken almost all over the world. When learning the English language, one needs to acquire four skills. They need to develop listening, speaking, reading and writing skill. Writing is difficult for English as Second Language (ESL) learners to acquire. It is an essential skill as they need it for many purposes in their daily lives. However, Malaysian pupils, being ESL learners and for some foreign language learners, it is even more challenging to master the skill. Teachers need to identify the area of weaknesses faced by their pupils so that they can choose appropriate materials and practical pedagogical approaches to help them learn. Error analysis is an effective way to help teachers obtain information on their pupils' kind of errors. This study aims to identify grammatical errors made by 77 Year Five primary pupils from a suburban school, focussing only on tenses. The analysis is done based on a short essay written by the pupils. This study suggests that by understanding their pupils' weaknesses, teachers will be able to develop interventions for the betterment of their pupils' learning.

Keywords: English As Second Language (ESL), Tenses, Writing, Error Analysis, Primary School Pupils

Introduction

In Malaysia, the English language is considered the second language compared to Bahasa Melayu, which is given the primary importance as it is the country's official national language (Thirusanku & Yunus 2014; Yamat, Farita, et al. 2014). One of the aspirations hoped to achieve by the Ministry of Education of Malaysia is for our younger generations to acquire both languages (Ministry of Education 2013). They are required to be able to use Bahasa Melayu as our national language and be competent in English if they were to compete in the globalised world.

English is taught as a second language in national schools, as it is considered the second most important language (Yamat, Farita, et al. 2014). In primary schools, Year One to Year Six and Form One to Form Five in secondary schools. Pupils are required to sit for the Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) when they are in Year Six, and one of the subjects evaluated is the English language. Meanwhile, when they have

reached Form Five, they are required to sit for Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM). Again, their competency in the language is tested. When they enrol in higher education, they need to sit for the Malaysian Universities English Test (MUET), which is compulsory when you pursue your degree. The government rationalises this to ensure that they will be able to compete in the world going through globalisation. However, it is found that there are still many graduates who are not competent in the language (Yamat, Fisher, et al. 2014).

Malaysia pupils being ESL learners, finds it difficult to write using the language. There are four skills to master the English language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Many ESL learners find writing the most challenging skill to acquire (Fareed et al. 2016; Gedion & Peter 2016; Ismail & Mohd. Shah 2015; Nusrat 2016; Raimes 1983; Sa 'diyah 2017; Seitova 2016; Yunus et al. 2018). Although it is challenging to acquire writing skill, they still need to

because writing is an important skill. People apply their skill in writing in their daily lives.

Proficiency in grammar improves ones' language production skill. Therefore, pupils need to learn the grammar of the language, idioms, and vocabulary before they can acquire the writing skill (Raimes 1983). Students score higher if they are good at writing (Asrifan 2015). The teacher's role is to choose functional materials combined with practical pedagogical approaches to help their pupils write better. To do this, teachers must first gather information on what errors are most commonly made by their pupils. Error analysis is a practical way for teachers to identify what types of errors frequently made by their pupils and what approaches can they use to amend that problem (Talif & Edwin 2015). This study aims to find out errors frequently made by Year Five pupils in tenses when writing short essays. A teacher can find a solution to help her pupils only if she knows what type of errors they are making.

Methodology

This study is quantitative, and sampling is purposive. Samplings are 77 pupils studying in a suburban school in Negeri Sembilan. All pupils are in Year Five and are taught by the same English Language teacher. The 77 pupils comprise

38 advanced class pupils and 39 lower intermediate class pupils who are labelled as Group 1 and Group 2. These two groups of pupils were selected based on the difference in competency levels to see if there is a difference in the errors made.

They were given a writing task to be completed within an hour. Just like UPSR, the number of words for the essay should not exceed 80 words. The researcher marked the essays and analysed the errors made. The frequency and percentages are presented in the tables. Discussion of findings is based on the tables, and examples of errors made are included.

Findings and Discussion

This section consists of data collected from this study. Findings are presented in two

sections. Section one will be one table showing the number of errors and one graph showing the percentage of errors made by these pupils in the use of tenses found in the short essays. The second section will be the examples of the errors made.

4.1 Analysis of essays

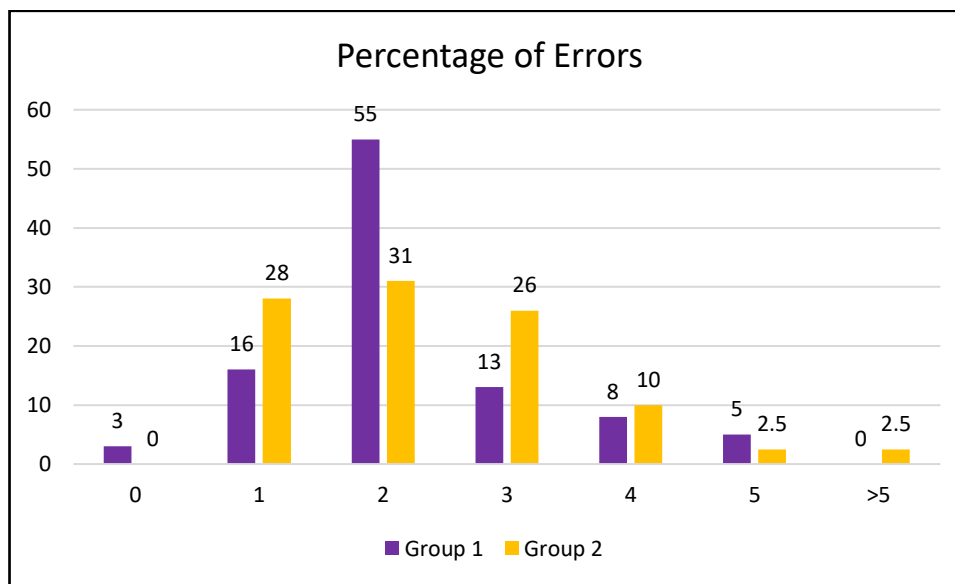
The table below shows the number of errors in the use of tenses in the short essays written by Group 1 and Group 2.

Table 1:

	Number of errors							TOTAL
	0	1	2	3	4	5	>5	
Group 1	1	6	21	5	3	2	0	38
Group 2	0	11	12	10	4	1	1	39

The graph below shows the percentage of errors found in the short essays on the use of tenses.

Graphic 1:



4.2 Examples of errors in the use of tenses

a) Present Tense

i) *The *ospital **open** from Monday till Saturday from 8.30 a.m till 4.30 p.m.*

*Correct form: The hospital **opens** from Monday till Saturday. It **opens** from 8.30 a.m*

till 4.30 p.m.

ii) *Berjaya Dental Hospital **provide*** the types of treatment.*

*Correct form: The Berjaya Dental Hospital **provides** many types of treatment.*

Example one and two show pupils used a plural verb with a singular noun. It indicates that pupils do not know how to differentiate singular and plural nouns and when to add an 's' to verbs that come after the noun.

b) Past participle

i) It is **open** on Monday till Saturday from 8.30 a.m; till 4.30 p.m.

*Correct form: It is **opened** from Monday till Saturday, from 8.30 a.m; till 4.30 a.m.*

ii) Hospital is open from morning till 4.30 p.m

*Correct form: The hospital is **opened** from morning till 4.30 p.m.*

Example one and two show the pupils did not use past participle after the auxiliary verb 'is'. It shows that they do not know that if they have an auxiliary verb before the action verb, then the action verb should be in the past participle.

omission of auxiliary verbs

iii) *The hospital *free vitamins * **given** to prevent gum disease on visits made for checkups.*

*Correct form: The hospital **has** free vitamins **given** to prevent gum disease on visits*

made for checkups.

iv) *They * **given** * to prevent gum * (to teeth).*

*Correct form: They **were given** free vitamins to prevent gum disease.*

Earlier, example one and two show pupils did not change the action verb to the past participle tense. Meanwhile, example three and four show pupils who did not add an auxiliary verb before a past participle. These examples are evidence that pupils lack knowledge in the usage of the past participle tense.

Conclusion

By analysing errors made by pupils, teachers could attain valuable information. This information can help teachers to decide on suitable remedial materials and pedagogical methods to help their pupils. This study identifies common errors made by pupils when using tenses.

Teachers need to identify errors made by their students to come up with solutions to improve their pupils' learning. In this study, it is evident that teachers need to develop appropriate materials and methods to overcome the problems in the usage of tenses to use them correctly in their essays in the future.

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