

Error Analysis of the Written English Essays of Secondary School Students in Malaysia: A Case Study

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Abstract

This study examines errors in a corpus of 72 essays written by 72 participants. The participants are Form Four Malay students who are studying at a secondary school in Malaysia; 37 male and 35 female. They have experienced approximately the same number of years of education through primary and secondary education in Malaysia. All of the participants come from non-English speaking background and hardly communicate in English outside the school. The instrument used for this study was participants' written essays and Markin software. All of the errors in the essays were identified and classified into various categorizations. The results of the study show that six most common errors committed by the participants were singular/plural form, verb tense, word choice, preposition, subject-verb agreement and word order. These aspects of writing in English pose the most difficult problems to participants. This study has shed light on the manner in which students internalize the rules of the target language, which is English. Such an insight into language learning problems is useful to teachers because it provides information on common trouble-spots in language learning which can be used in the preparation of effective teaching materials.

Keywords: Error analysis, essays in English, grammatical errors.

1. Introduction

Learning a Second Language (L2) is a lifelong process and it is often a challenging experience for L2 learners. English has become the L2 after it was introduced to Malaysia during colonization. Presently, it is an international language and is used as the language in international relations, and in exchanging knowledge and technology. It was only since a few decades ago that it was taught to almost all school children. In general, local Malaysian students have been exposed to eleven years of learning English in primary and secondary schools.

A Brief Historical Account of English in Malaysia

According to Solomon (1988), English has had a comparatively long history in Malaysia. Since attaining independence in 1957, Malaysia has gone through vast changes in various fields. Not the least of this is development of educational facilities from primary school up to tertiary level. Together with the physical facilities major changes were also implemented in policies related to educational syllabus, and the medium of instruction; that is, the languages used in imparting the knowledge. Education in

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