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THE USE OF PREPOSITIONS AMONG MALAY ADULT ESL LEARNERS

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THE USE OF PREPOSITIONS AMONG MALAY ADULT ESL LEARNERS

By

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Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Degree of Doctor Of Philosophy

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UPM

DEDICATION

I humbly dedicate this piece of work at the lotus feet of my beloved Guru, Her Holiness Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, 'Amma', the source of all beauty and love.

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

THE USE OF PREPOSITIONS AMONG MALAY ADULT ESL LEARNERS

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February 2008

Chairman: **Associate Professor Wong Bee Eng, PhD**

Faculty: **Modern Languages and Communication**

One predicament facing an educationist is whether grammar should be taught formally, or allowed to be naturally acquired. This question is pertinent in the face of the fact that there has generally been a deterioration of students' grammar skills among English as a second language (ESL) learners in Malaysia, especially in the use of syntactical categories such as prepositions and articles.

In order to get to the depth of the issue, a protracted study using a case study research design was carried out. This study was carried out on seven Malay students from the International Islamic University Malaysia. The study sought to determine the extent to which students acquired English prepositions in the naturalistic setting in the oral and written modes, the different types of errors in students' use of prepositions, in the use of alternative locative frames, and whether there was a specific pattern in acquisition of prepositions. Data from students' written samples, interviews and presentations were collected. The baseline data was collected initially, and subsequent data collected at six monthly intervals over three years. The progress of the students was monitored over this period. An analysis of students' use of prepositions in the various speaking and writing tasks was carried out.

Although errors persist, most subjects showed improvements in their use of prepositions for both speaking and writing tasks. The errors they committed were of two kinds: errors of commission and errors of omission. They had more errors of commission than errors of omission. In the use of alternative locative frames, one of the most common errors was the unnecessary use of the phrase involving a preposition, 'for me'. Persistent errors could arise due to incomplete linguistic rule formation. It also cannot be denied that there could be transfer from the students' first language (L1). There were also instances of other words like adverbs being used instead of prepositions. With

respect to the performances of students in the most commonly used prepositions, and in certain clusters of prepositions, in the speaking tasks, the best improvement was seen in the prepositions ‘for’, ‘in’ and ‘about’, while in the writing tasks, the prepositions ‘to, ‘of’ and ‘in’ were among those where the students had the best results.

These findings imply that grammar should be taught in a way that is compatible with the natural processes of acquisition. The subjects’ overall competency was not of a very high level, not having gained native use of the various prepositions. Consequently, language instructors should also be equipped with special skills to be able to teach prepositions; they should be provided with suitable, accurate teaching materials. Learners should also be developmentally ready to acquire prepositions, and changes have to be made in the curriculum for instruction of prepositions that pose greater problems to second language (L2) learners.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Dokotor Falsafah

PENGGUNAAN KATA SENDI DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR MELAYU DEWASA DALAM BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA

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Salah satu masalah yang dihadapi oleh para pendidik adalah samada tatabahasa perlu diajar secara formal, ataupun dipelajari dengan sendirinya secara semulajadi. Isu perlu diberi tumpuan di negara ini memandangkan kemahiran penuntut yang mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua, dalam penggunaan tatabahasa Bahasa Inggeris didapati telah merosot, terutamanya dalam penggunaan sendikata dan sistem artikal.

Bagi tujuan mengkaji isu dengan teliti, satu penyelidikan dengan menggunakan rekabentuk kajian kes telah dijalankan. Penyelidikan ini dijalankan ke atas tujuh orang

penuntut Melayu dari Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia. Tujuan penyelidikan ini ialah untuk memastikan sejauh mana penuntut-penuntut ini telah mempelajari sendikata pada aspek lisan dan penulisan dalam keadaan semulajadi, jenis kesilapan yang didapati dalam penggunaan sendikata oleh penuntut-penuntut dan penggunaan perkara-perkara alternatif, serta sama ada terdapat rekabentuk yang spesifik dalam proses pembelajaran sendikata. Maklumat daripada sampel penulisan, temuduga dan pembentangan telah pun diperolehi. Data asas diperolehi ketika penyelidikan bermula, dan data seterusnya dipungut setiap enam bulan sepanjang masa tiga tahun penyelidikan dijalankan. Kemajuan penuntut penuntut dipantau dalam masa ini. Seterusnya kegunaan sendikata oleh penuntut dalam aktiviti-aktiviti lisan dan penulisan dianalisa.

Walaupun terdapat kesilapan, kebanyakan subjek menunjukkan peningkatan taraf kegunaan sendikata dalam aktiviti-aktiviti lisan dan penulisan. Terdapat dua jenis kesilapan yang dilakukan – kesilapan komisyen dan kesilapan omisyen. Dalam kegunaan perkara-perkara alternatif, kesilapan yang sering dilakukan ialah dengan perkataan '*for me*' (untuk saya). Kesilapan sering berlaku mungkin atas sebab 'pembentukan peraturan yang tidak lengkap' (*incomplete linguistic rule formation*). Selain daripada itu terdapat pindaan daripada bahasa ibunda kepada bahasa kedua (*second language*). Terdapat juga perkataan lain seperti 'adverb' digunakan menggantikan sendikata yang sepatutnya digunakan. Bagi pencapaian penuntut-

penuntut dalam sendikata yang biasa digunakan, dan dari analisa kumpulan sendikata tertentu, dalam aktiviti lisan, terdapat perubahan yang terbaik bagi sendikata '*for', 'in'* dan *'about'* , manakala dalam aktiviti penulisan, keputusan yang terbaik adalah dengan sendikata '*to'*, '*of*' dan '*in'*.

Hasil penyelidikan menunjukkan bahawa tatabahasa seharusnya diajar selaras dengan proses semulajadi pembelajaran sendikata. Keupayaan penuntut-penuntut secara amnya tidak begitu tinggi dan tidak mencapai tahap penggunaan sendikata tempatan (*native use of prepositions*). Dengan sedemikian guru-guru harus dilengkapkan dengan kemahiran khas supaya dapat mengajar sendikata, dan juga disediakan bahan-bahan pendidikan yang tepat dan sesuai. Penuntut-penuntut harus sedia untuk mempelajari sendikata, dan perubahan perlu dilakukan dalam kurikulum bagi pengajaran sendikata memandangkan ianya merupakan punca utama masalah-masalah yang dihadapi oleh pelajar-pelajar bahasa kedua.

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I certify that an Examination Committee has met on 27 February 2008 to conduct the final examination of Beena Sudhakaran on her Ph D thesis entitled "The Use Of Prepositions Among Adult Malay ESL Learners" in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or other institutions.

_____

BEENA SUDHAKARAN

Date: 20 May 2008

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BM	*Bahasa Malaysia,* Malay language
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
EPT	English Placement Test
ESL	English as a Second Language
FL	Foreign Language
IIO	Input-Interaction-Output
IIUM	International Islamic University Malaysia
KBSM	*Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah* (Integrated Secondary School Curriculum)
KBSR	*Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah* (Integrated Primary School Curriculum)
L1	First language or mother tongue
L2	Second language
NL	Native Language
PMR	*Peperiksaan Menengah Rendah* (Lower Secondary Examination)
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SPM	*Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (Malaysian Certificate of Education)
TL	Target Language

UIA *Universiti Islam Antarabangsa* (International Islamic University)

UPSR *Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (*Primary School Students Test*)*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical considerations of the study, and significance of the study.

Background to the Study

The learning of another language, after the native language has been learned, is referred to as second language acquisition (SLA). In addition, it may also refer to the learning of a third or fourth language, the important aspect being the learning of a non-native language ‘‘after’’ the learning of the native language (Mitchell and Myles, 2004). Learning a language other than the mother tongue is a complex process that happens over time (Ortega and Iberri-Shea, 2005). This second language acquisition process can take place either in the classroom or in a more ‘natural’ exposure situation (Gass and Selinker, 2001).

The field of SLA began in the 1940s and 1950s, when there was increased interest in foreign language teaching and learning, especially in the United States (US). This was due to the demands for effective language skills after World War Two, mainly to communicate with allies as well as for secret service work against enemies (Allwright, 1988). In the US there were also demands for developing specialised language courses