



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**THE EFFECTS OF NOTICING TRAINING ON MALAY ESL LEARNERS'
USE OF PAST TIME FORMS IN WRITING**

MASKANAH MOHAMMAD LOTFIE

FPP 2007 16



**THE EFFECTS OF NOTICING TRAINING ON MALAY ESL LEARNERS'
USE OF PAST TIME FORMS IN WRITING**

By

MASKANAH MOHAMMAD LOTFIE

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

January 2007



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

**THE EFFECTS OF NOTICING TRAINING ON MALAY ESL LEARNERS'
USE OF PAST TIME FORMS IN WRITING**

By

MASKANAH MOHAMMAD LOTFIE

January 2007

Chairman: Arshad Abd. Samad, PhD

Faculty: Educational Studies

This study investigates the role of noticing in improving written accuracy. The noticing hypothesis focuses on the need to enhance learners' awareness of target language forms in order to convert input into intake and to subsequently internalise input as part of interlanguage. This study also takes into account the comprehensible output hypothesis that proposes that output can promote noticing as it encourages learners to become aware of the gap between their interlanguage and the target language usage. These concepts together with elements from the process approach to writing have been translated into three types of feedback techniques for ESL learners' written output. The techniques are Enhancement, Reformulation, and the Sequential technique. All three techniques function as a means of enhancing learners'



awareness of past time forms and are, therefore, form-focused in nature but do not involve explicit explanations of those target forms.

The study has adopted a mixed approach design that is both confirmatory and interpretative. A quasi-experiment that tested the effects of the instructional techniques involved 81 matriculation (post-secondary) students from three groups. Qualitative procedures included the collection of think aloud protocols which were administered to investigate learners' cognitive responses to the instructional techniques. A content analysis of written output identified the learners' patterns of past time form acquisition. An attitude survey gauged the learners' affective perceptions of instruction.

Respondents in the Enhancement group tended to produce non-metalingual responses during the think aloud procedure. On the other hand, the respondents from the Reformulation group produced more metalingual responses. Results suggest that noticing is influenced by the types of learner responses to the techniques. The analysis of the think aloud protocols and the essays of the Enhancement group indicate that the respondents may have corrected errors while responding to the treatment, but failed to do so in the subsequent essays. Similarly in the Reformulation group, awareness of why a form is corrected may not result in corrected forms in the second essay. In other words, correct responses to treatments do not necessarily ensure subsequent correct usage of the forms.

There is also evidence that the structural features of a target form influence the success of the form being noticed. The simple past form was easily noticed than the more complex present perfect form with its auxiliaries and past participles. Statistical results obtained through the applications of paired-samples *t* tests and ANCOVA suggest that all three instructional techniques were successful in enhancing noticing and in increasing learners' written accuracy. The learners who participated in the study perceived the instructional interventions favourably.

The study indicates that form-focused techniques should be incorporated as part of ESL course syllabuses and that the techniques should be included in writing courses. Instruction should also include output-based input that can authentically point out to ESL instructors individualised accuracy-related problems in their students' written work. The complex tense-aspect temporal references to the past is an area of the English language system that would need more focus at the post-secondary level.

This study has managed to further refine the concept of noticing in SLA. It shows that the types and effectiveness of noticing are influenced by the nature of input, stimuli, selection of target forms and learner backgrounds. Noticing is, indeed, an important process in an ESL learner's journey to acquire linguistic items. Instructional interventions that try to enhance

noticing in relation to written accuracy should effectively help students as they continue to develop their interlanguage.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**KESAN LATIHAN PEMERHATIAN KE ATAS PENGGUNAAN BERTULIS
RUJUKAN KE MASA LEPAS PELAJAR-PELAJAR MELAYU YANG
MEMPELAJARI BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA**

Oleh

MASKANAH MOHAMMAD LOTFIE

Januari 2007

Pengerusi: Arshad Abd. Samad, PhD

Fakulti: Pengajian Pendidikan

Kajian ini ialah suatu penyelidikan ke atas peranan pemerhatian dalam meningkatkan ketepatan nahu dalam penulisan. Hipotesis pemerhatian bertumpu kepada keperluan untuk meningkatkan perhatian pelajar ke atas sesuatu nahu terpilih dalam menukarkan input kepada output dan seterusnya menyerapkan input sebagai sebahagian dari bahasa yang sedang di pelajari. Kajian ini juga mengengahkan hipotesis output yang difahami yang mencadangkan bahawa hasil penulisan dapat meningkatkan pemerhatian kerana ia menggalakkan pelajar supaya sedar akan perbezaan di antara penggunaan bahasa mereka sebagai pelajar sesuatu bahasa dengan penggunaan bahasa tersebut yang sebenar. Konsep-konsep dan beberapa

elemen dari pendekatan penulisan cara proses telah di terjemahkan kepada tiga jenis teknik pembetulan hasil penulisan pelajar-pelajar yang mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua. Teknik-teknik tersebut ialah Peningkatan Visual, Penulisan Semula dan Rangkaian. Ketiga-tiga teknik berfungsi untuk meningkatkan pemerhatian pelajar-pelajar kepada cara merujuk ke masa lepas. Teknik-teknik tersebut menumpu kepada sesuatu bentuk nahu tetapi tidak menjelaskannya secara eksplisit.

Rekabentuk kajian ini bersifat campuran. Suatu eksperimen kuasi menguji keberkesanan teknik-teknik pembelajaran yang dilalui oleh 81 pelajar pusat matrikulasi dari tiga kumpulan. Kaedah kualitatif yang digunakan termasuk pengumpulan laporan secara lisan yang bertujuan untuk mengetahui respon pelajar-pelajar terhadap teknik-teknik pembelajaran. Analisis hasil penulisan dilakukan untuk menentukan struktur-struktur nahu yang dipelajari oleh pelajar. Satu kajiselidik dibuat untuk mengetahui sikap pelajar terhadap teknik-teknik pembelajaran.

Dapatan kajian menunjukkan pemerhatian ke atas nahu dipengaruhi oleh jenis-jenis respon pelajar terhadap teknik-teknik pembelajaran. Analisa protokol prosedur berfikir secara kuat dan esei kumpulan Visual menunjukkan bahawa responden mungkin membetulkan kesalahan nahu semasa melalui teknik tersebut tetapi mungkin gagal membetulkannya di dalam esei. Ini juga terjadi dalam kumpulan Penulisan Semula di mana pemerhatian ke atas sebab

sesuatu kesalahan dibetulkan tidak bermaksud penggunaan yang betul di dalam esei. Dalam lain kata, respon yang tepat kepada teknik tidak semestinya membuahkan kegunaan nahu yang betul di penggunaan seterusnya.

Terdapat bukti yang menunjukkan bahawa struktur komponen-komponen nahu yang dipelajari mempengaruhi kejayaan pelajar mempelajarinya. Keputusan ujian statistik yang didapati dari ujian t bersandar dan ujian ANCOVA memberi kesimpulan bahawa ketiga-tiga teknik pembelajaran berkesan dalam meningkatkan pemerhatian dan menambahkan ketepatan penggunaan nahu dalam penulisan. Pelajar-pelajar yang terlibat juga berpandangan positif terhadap teknik-teknik tersebut.

Kajian ini menunjukkan kaedah penumpuan terhadap nahu yang menitik-beratkan pemerhatian patut di gabungkan dalam sukatan pelajaran dan teknik-teknik yang sudah diuji perlu diterapkan dalam program pembelajaran penulisan. Langkah-langkah perlu juga diambil untuk memanfaatkan hasil penulisan yang boleh dijadikan input pembelajaran. Input ini dapat menunjukkan kepada tenaga pengajar Bahasa Inggeris kelemahan tersendiri seseorang pelajar terutamanya dalam penulisan. Cara merujuk kepada masa lepas adalah satu bahagian kompleks nahu bahasa Inggeris yang memerlukan tumpuan di peringkat pembelajaran lepasan sekolah menengah.

Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa konsep pemerhatian boleh diperjelaskan lagi. Jenis dan keberkesanan pemerhatian bergantung kepada input, stimuli, struktur nahu yang terpilih dan latarbelakang pelajar. Pemerhatian sememangnya proses yang penting dalam usaha pelajar-pelajar bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua mempelajari nahu bahasa tersebut. Kaedah pembelajaran yang cuba meningkatkan proses penumpuan dalam penulisan dapat menolong pelajar-pelajar memantapkan penguasaan bahasa mereka.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my esteemed supervisors without whom this thesis could not have been completed. This work would not have reached this academic level without the comprehensive guidance and patience of Dr. Arshad Abd. Samad, the Chairman of the Supervisory Committee. My gratitude also goes to Professor Chan Swee Heng who offered invaluable insights drawn from her vast SLA experience and Professor Turiman Suandi who provided great moral support and knowledgeable input especially in research methodology and statistics.

My appreciation goes to those at the International Islamic University Malaysia: the Research Centre for the partial funding of the study, the Management Services Department for the ease with which I obtained continuous study leave and financial assistance, the Dean and Deputy Deans of CELPAD, as well as the Head of ELD, CELPAD, for their unfailing support. I would also like to thank the numerous Matriculation and the Gombak campus colleagues for their assistance in the preliminary stage of the study, data collection and data analyses. I would also like to commend the IIUM library and its dedicated staff for their great assistance in locating and supplying the resources I needed. I will be forever grateful to all the students who were involved in the data collection of this study. Thank you also to the Public Services Department for granting my study leave and awarding the scholarship. I



would also like to thank all those at Universiti Putra Malaysia who assisted me in various ways to complete this work.

I also deeply appreciate the kind words and deeds from former lecturers, friends, colleagues, and everybody who helped me to persevere and complete the thesis. I am indebted to my siblings, children, and all loved ones for their continuous encouragement, support, and love. I have to thank my father, Mohammad Lotfie Ibrahim, who has been my source of inspiration despite his absence, and my mother, Zainon Sulaiman, who has given me strength and solace with her presence. Thank you God for the abovementioned people, institutions, and the destined completion of this academic endeavour.





This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee are as follows:

Arshad Abd. Samad, PhD

Lecturer
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

Chan Swee Heng, PhD

Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

Turiman Suandi, PhD

Professor
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

AINI IDERIS, PhD

Professor/Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date: 10 MAY 2007



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.

MASKANAH MOHAMMAD LOTFIE

Date: 31 JANUARY 2007

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	ii
ABSTRAK	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	x
APPROVAL	xii
DECLARATION	xiv
LIST OF TABLES	xx
LIST OF FIGURES	xxii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xxiii
 CHAPTER	
I Introduction	1
Background of the Study	1
Statement of the Problem	6
Objectives of the Study	9
Research Questions	10
Significance of the Study	11
Scope and Limitations	14
Operational Definitions	17
Errors	17
Written Accuracy	17
Feedback Techniques	18
Input Enhancement	18
Output-based Enhancement Technique	19
Metalingual Responses	19
Non-metalingual Responses	20
Noticing	20
Noticing Training	20
Reformulation Technique	21
Sequential Technique	21
Past Time Forms	21
Writing	22
 II Review of Related Literature	 23
ESL Writing	24
Process Writing Approach and Cognitivist Writing Model	27
Errors and Feedback	34
Interlanguage and Interlanguage Development	45
Noticing and Comprehensible Output Hypotheses	47
Researching Cognitive Processes	55
Reformulation	61

Input and Output-Based Enhancement	67
Second Language Acquisition and Grammar Instruction	69
Focus-on-meaning	69
Focus-on-forms	71
Focus-on-form	75
Form-focused Instruction	76
Implicit, Explicit, and Metalingual Knowledge of Language	80
Learner Attitudes Towards Instruction	81
Temporal Reference and Past Time Forms	86
English Language Tense and Aspect System	86
Past Time Forms in English	89
Temporal Reference and Past Time Forms in Malay	92
Studies on Past Time Forms	95
Conceptual Framework of the Study	102
III Methodology	105
Research Framework	105
Pilot Study	107
Quasi-Experimental Design	108
Internal Validity	112
Population and Sampling	114
Administration	118
Instructional Treatment	119
Introduction to Noticing	120
Enhancement and Reformulation Techniques	122
Instrumentation	129
Essay Writing Test	129
Evaluators' Interrater Reliability	134
Grammaticality Judgment Test	134
Analysing Pretest and Posttest Data	138
Exploratory Data Analysis and Paired-samples <i>t</i> test	138
Exploratory Data Analysis and ANCOVA	139
Effect Size	140
Think Aloud Procedure	141
Respondents	141
Procedure	141
Training	144
Famous person essay	145
Validity	145
Reliability	147
Content analysis	148

	Coding Think Aloud Protocols	148
	Categorising Think Aloud Protocols	149
	Content Analysis of Written Output	150
	Obligatory Occasions	150
	Procedure	151
	Attitude Survey	153
	Summary	154
IV	RESULTS	156
	Research Question 1	157
	Metalingual and Non-metalingual Responses	158
	Enhancement Technique	158
	Metalingual Responses	159
	Non-metalingual Responses	162
	Responses and Subsequent Use of Past	164
	Time Forms	
	Summary of Response Categories	165
	Reformulation Technique	166
	Metalingual Responses	167
	Non-metalingual Responses	169
	Responses and Subsequent Use of Past	170
	Time Forms	
	Summary of Response Categories	170
	Research Question 2	172
	Successful noticing of the simple past	173
	Successful noticing of the simple past	173
	when the simple present/base forms of	
	regular verbs were erroneously applied	
	Successful noticing of the simple past	174
	when the simple present forms of the	
	copula <i>be</i> were erroneously applied	
	Successful noticing of the simple past	175
	when the simple present forms of	
	irregular verbs were erroneously applied	
	Successful noticing of the simple past	176
	when the simple past form was	
	erroneously combined with the simple	
	present third person inflection	
	Successful noticing of the simple past	176
	when the present perfect was	
	erroneously applied	
	Successful noticing of the simple past	177
	when the past progressive was	
	erroneously applied	
	Noticing omitted tense marking verbs	178

Noticing regular and irregular verbs	180
Successful noticing of the present perfect progressive	181
Successful noticing of the present perfect progressive when the present progressive was erroneously applied	181
Successful noticing of the present perfect progressive when the simple past was erroneously applied	182
Successful noticing of the past progressive	182
Successful noticing of the past progressive when the present progressive was erroneously applied	183
Successful noticing of the past progressive when the simple past forms were erroneously applied	183
Successful noticing of the past progressive instead of other forms	184
Successful noticing of number agreement	185
Partial noticing of the present perfect	185
Successful noticing of the present perfect auxiliary <i>have</i> when the simple past was erroneously applied	186
Partial correction of aspectual markers	187
Research Questions 3 and 4	190
Effects of Instruction within Each Treatment Group	190
Essay Scores	191
Grammaticality Judgment Test Scores	193
Effects of Treatments on Each Past Time Form	195
Comparative Effectiveness of Treatments among Groups	199
Essay Scores	199
Grammaticality Judgment Test Scores	200
Research Question 5	201
Responses to the Questionnaire	202
Responses to the Open-ended Question on Instructional Techniques	203
Summary of Results	205
Research Question 1	205
Research Question 2	206
Research Question 3	208
Research Question 4	210
Research Question 5	210

V	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	211
	Cognitive Responses to Instruction	212
	Enhancement Technique and Non-metalingual Responses	212
	Reformulation Technique and Metalingual Responses	214
	Responses and Accuracy in Subsequent Written Work	216
	Noticing and Patterns of Acquisition	217
	Simple Past	217
	Structural Simplicity, Acquisitional Order, Pushed Output, and Exposure	218
	Present Perfect	220
	Structural Complexity and Acquisitional Order	221
	Selective Attention Hypothesis	222
	Restructuring and Partial Acquisition of Grammatical Features	223
	Effects of Instruction in Improving Past Time Form Use	224
	Effects of Each Instructional Treatment	224
	Essay and Grammaticality Judgment Test Results	225
	Simple Past and Increased Accuracy	227
	Effects of Treatment on Present Perfect, Present Perfect Progressive, and Past Progressive	227
	Avoidance	229
	Reformulation and Accuracy	230
	Sequential Technique	231
	Effects of the Three Feedback Techniques	232
	Affect and Noticing	233
	Conclusion	236
	Implications and Recommendations	240
	Theoretical Implications	241
	Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations	244
	Directions for Further Research	248
	REFERENCES	251
	APPENDICES	274
	BIODATA OF THE AUTHOR	330

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	The English Language Tense and Aspect System Matrix	88/100
2	The Past Time Forms of the English Language	91
3	The Static-group Pretest-posttest Design	109
4	Groups and Treatments	110
5	Internal Validity Threats and Controlling Measures	113
6	Sessions with Students	118
7	Activities and Materials for Introduction to Noticing	120
8	Characteristics of Reformulation and Enhancement Techniques	123
9	Feedback Techniques' Typographical Modifications	127
10	Essay Writing Scoring Scheme	131
11	Summary of Research Procedure	155
12	Enhancement Groups' Response Types and Error Correction in Second Drafts	165
13	Reformulation Groups' Response Types and Error Correction in Second Drafts	171
14	Summary of Errors and Noticed Features	189
15	Result of the Paired-samples <i>t</i> test on Essay Scores for the Enhancement Group	191
16	Result of the Paired-samples <i>t</i> test on Essay Scores for the Reformulation Group	191
17	Result of the Paired-samples <i>t</i> test on Essay Scores for the Sequential Group	192
18	Result of the Paired-samples <i>t</i> test on GJT Scores for	193

	the Enhancement Group	
19	Result of the Paired-samples <i>t</i> test on GJT Scores for the Reformulation Group	194
20	Result of the Paired-samples <i>t</i> test on GJT Scores for the Sequential group	194
21	Results of the Enhancement Group's Paired-samples <i>t</i> tests on GJT Scores for Past Time Forms	196
22	Results of the Reformulation Group's Paired-samples <i>t</i> tests on GJT Scores for Past Time Forms	197
23	Results of the Sequential Group's Paired-samples <i>t</i> tests on GJT Scores for Past Time Forms	198
24	Analysis of Covariance of Posttest Scores for the Essay Test	200
25	Analysis of Covariance of Posttest Scores for the GJT	201
26	Mean Scores of Learners' Responses to Instructional Techniques	202

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	Basic Implementation of the Reformulation Technique	64
2	Instructed Language Learning	77
3	Conceptual Framework	102
4	Research Framework	106
5	Think Aloud Procedure	143
6	Content Analysis Procedure	152

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANCOVA	Analysis of Covariance
CELPAD	Centre for Languages and Pre-university Academic Development
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EDA	Exploratory Data Analysis
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EPT	English Placement Test
ESL	English as a Second Language
GJT	Grammaticality Judgment Test
IIUM	International Islamic University, Malaysia
KUSZA	Kolej Ugama Sultan Zainal Abidin
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
UiTM	Universiti Teknologi MARA

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Academic writing is a productive skill that is especially crucial at the tertiary level. At Malaysian institutions where English is the medium of instruction, not only does a student need to write convincingly but he also has to do so effectively. This would mean writing with some sound knowledge of the content area, as well as ensuring the coherence of ideas and accuracy of grammatical structures. That the latter is of great importance is succinctly pointed out by Muncie (2002, p. 183) who mentions that "grammar is just as important an instrument of communication as content, and a text cannot be written cohesively without attention being paid to how meaning is being expressed through the grammar." Similarly, Ferris (2002) asserts that students' morphological and syntactic accuracy is important because inaccuracy may interfere with the comprehensibility of their written message. Ensuring grammatical accuracy is therefore an exceptionally important element of academic writing as it facilitates successful communication.

Contemporary second language writing theorists such as Grabe and Kaplan (1996), Krapels (1990), Kroll (2001), and Matsuda (2003) point out that a substantial number of studies on English as a second language (ESL) writing

