



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**EFFECTS OF A MEANING-BASED APPROACH
IN TEACHING THE TENSE SYSTEM TO
MALAY ESL COLLEGE STUDENTS**

AGUS RIAN TO

FPP 2003 8

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**By
AGUS RIANTO**

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

March 2003



DEDICATION

Sincere Love and Appreciation for

**My Parents,
Wife and Little Jihan
And Brothers and Sisters**



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

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Chairman: Dr. Arshad Abd Samad

Faculty: Educational Studies

It is not uncommon to see Malay students at college level face difficulty in communicating their ideas effectively in written English. Their difficulties indicate their lack of mastery of important grammatical systems of the English language. Their inability to effectively convey ideas in written English may be because during their time of learning English, they have been mostly presented with direct instruction in communicative strategies and/or grammatical instructions that emphasize a relation of formal determination.

In general, this study explored the effects of an instructional approach which integrated target formal features into meaning-based activities (termed Meaning-Based Approach—MBA) on the acquisition of the English tense system.



Specifically, this study investigated four issues: (1) the effect of MBA on learners' performance in understanding messages conveyed by verbs of the tense system; (2) the effect of MBA on learners' performance in using messages conveyed by verbs of the tense system in written production; (3) the effect of MBA on Lower and Higher Proficiency Students' (LPS and HPS) performance in understanding messages conveyed by verbs of the tense system; and (4) the effect of MBA on Lower and Higher Proficiency Students' (LPS and HPS) performance in using messages conveyed by verbs of the tense system.

A quasi-experimental between groups design was used in which a pretest, a six-week treatment on tense system, and a posttest were administered. This study was conducted at Kolej Legenda Langkawi (KLL)—a private Malaysian institute of higher learning located on Langkawi island, Kedah, Malaysia. The subjects of this study were Malay ESL students taking an English proficiency course. The treatment group was presented with the MBA and the control group received instruction which focused on target forms in isolation (termed Form-Based Approach—FBA). The collected data was tested for statistical significance by means of an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) for the first and the second issues and t-test for the third and the fourth issues.

The results of the first issue indicated that subjects presented with the MBA performed better in understanding the messages conveyed by the verbs of the tense system than those presented with the FBA ($F = 422.77, p = 0.00$). Similar to the results of the first issue, the result of the second issue indicated that subjects

presented with the MBA performed better in using the messages conveyed by the verbs of the tense system than those presented with the FBA ($F = 2399.76$, $p = 0.00$).

The results of the third issue indicated that after presented with the meaning-based approach (MBA) the Lower Proficiency Students (LPS) performed just as well as the Higher Proficiency Students (HPS) in understanding the messages conveyed by the verbs of the tense system ($t = -0.97$, $p = 0.34$). Similar to the results of the third issue, the results of the fourth issue indicated that after presented with the meaning-based approach (MBA) the Lower Proficiency Students (LPS) performed just as well as the Higher Proficiency Students (HPS) in using the messages conveyed by the verbs of the tense system ($t = -2.37$, $p = 0.21$).

The results of the study offer evidence that the meaning-based approach does provide the learners with what they need to know in order to translate theoretical knowledge into practice. The results of the study also offer evidence that the meaning-based approach has similar effect in helping lower and higher proficiency learners understand and use the messages conveyed by the verbs of the tense system. The better performance made by the learners exposed to the meaning-based treatment clearly points to a strong relationship between the treatment and the quality of the learners' performance in translating their theoretical knowledge (understanding the messages) into practice (using the messages).

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

**KEBERKESANAN PENDEKATAN ERTI DALAM PENGAJARAN
SISTEM *TENSE* TERHADAP PELAJAR- PELAJAR MELAYU YANG
MENGAMBIL KURSUS BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA
KEDUA DI PERINGKAT KOLEJ**

Oleh

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Pelajar-pelajar Melayu di peringkat kolej sering menghadapi kesukaran dalam menyampaikan gagasan mereka secara berkesan di dalam bentuk tulisan yang menggunakan bahasa Inggeris. Kesukaran tersebut mungkin diakibatkan oleh kurangnya penguasaan sistem nahu dalam bahasa Inggeris. Kurangnya penguasaan dalam sistim nahu bahasa Inggeris kemungkinan besar disebabkan oleh pendekatan pengajaran bahasa tersebut yang diterima oleh pelajar-pelajar Melayu sebelum memasuki kolej. Pelajar-pelajar tersebut mungkin telah didedahkan oleh pendekatan pengajaran bahasa Inggeris yang hanya memberikan penekanan pada cara-cara berkomunikasi ataupun pendekatan pengajaran yang hanya menekankan bentuk-bentuk nahu sahaja.



Secara amnya, penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji keberkesanan suatu pendekatan pengajaran bahasa Inggeris yang menggabungkan pendekatan yang memberikan penekanan pada bentuk-bentuk nahu bahasa sasaran dengan aktiviti-aktiviti yang memberi penekanan pada erti dan fungsi bentuk-bentuk nahu sasaran (seterusnya dipanggil pendekatan erti) dalam penguasaan sistem kata kerja yang mempunyai kaitan dengan waktu di dalam bahasa Inggeris (seterusnya dipanggil sistem *tense*). Secara khususnya, penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji empat jenis isu (1) kesan pendekatan erti dalam membantu pelajar memahami pesanan atau erti yang disampaikan oleh bentuk-bentuk kata kerja yang terkandung dalam sistem *tense* yang dikaji; (2) kesan pendekatan erti dalam membantu pelajar menggunakan pesanan atau erti dalam tulisan yang disampaikan oleh bentuk-bentuk kata kerja yang terkandung dalam sistem *tense* yang dikaji, (3) kesan pendekatan erti dalam membantu pelajar-pelajar dari golongan yang mempunyai tahap lebih rendah dan tahap lebih tinggi dalam penguasaan bahasa Inggeris memahami pesanan atau erti yang disampaikan oleh bentuk-bentuk kata kerja yang terkandung dalam sistem *tense* yang dikaji; (4) kesan pendekatan erti dalam membantu pelajar-pelajar dari golongan yang mempunyai tahap lebih rendah dan tahap lebih tinggi dalam penguasaan bahasa Inggeris menggunakan pesanan atau erti dalam tulisan yang disampaikan oleh bentuk-bentuk kata kerja yang terkandung dalam sistem *tense* yang dikaji

Penyelidikan ini menggunakan rekabentuk quasi-eksperimen yang melibatkan subjek melakukan praujian, menerima olahan selama enam minggu, dan melakukan pasca ujian. Penyelidikan ini dilakukan di Kolej Legenda Langkawi

(KLL)—sebuah Kolej swasta yang terletak di pulau Langkawi, Kedah, Malaysia. Subjek kajian adalah pelajar-pelajar Melayu yang telah mengambil matapelajaran Bahasa Inggeris III (DDH 2112). Subjek telah dibahagikan kepada dua kumpulan, kumpulan olahan dan kumpulan kawalan. Kumpulan olahan diajar dengan menggunakan kaedah erti yakni kaedah yang menggabungkan pengajaran yang memberikan penekanan pada bentuk-bentuk nahu bahasa sasaran dengan aktiviti-aktiviti yang melibatkan penekanan pada fungsi dan erti daripada bentuk-bentuk nahu sasaran. Kumpulan kawalan pula diajar dengan menggunakan pendekatan pengajaran yang hanya menekankan pada bentuk-bentuk nahu bahasa sasaran secara berasingan (seterusnya dipanggil pendekatan bentuk). Data yang telah terkumpul diuji secara statistik dengan menggunakan kaedah analisis kovarians (ANCOVA) untuk isu pertama dan kedua dan ujian-t untuk isu ketiga dan keempat.

Hasil kajian yang melibatkan isu pertama mendapati bahawa kumpulan yang diajar dengan kaedah erti mempunyai pencapaian yang lebih tinggi secara statistik dalam memahami pesanan atau erti yang disampaikan oleh bentuk-bentuk kata kerja yang terkandung dalam sistem *tense* yang dikaji berbanding dengan kumpulan yang diajar dengan pendekatan bentuk ($F = 422.77, p = 0.00$). Hasil kajian yang melibatkan isu kedua juga mendapati bahawa kumpulan yang diajar dengan kaedah erti mempunyai pencapaian yang lebih tinggi secara statistik dalam menggunakan pesanan atau erti dalam tulisan yang disampaikan oleh bentuk-bentuk kata kerja yang terkandung dalam enam sistem *tense* yang dikaji

berbanding dengan kumpulan yang diajar dengan pendekatan bentuk ($F = 2399.76, p = 0.00$).

Hasil kajian yang membabitkan isu ketiga mendapati bahawa pelajar-pelajar yang mempunyai tahap lebih rendah dalam penguasaan bahasa Inggeris mempunyai pencapaian yang sama secara statistik dengan pelajar-pelajar yang mempunyai tahap penguasaan lebih tinggi dalam memahami pesan atau erti yang disampaikan oleh bentuk-bentuk kata kerja yang terkandung dalam sistem *tense* terbabit ($t = -0.97, p = 0.34$). Seperti hasil kajian isu ketiga, hasil kajian yang membabitkan isu keempat mendapati bahawa pelajar-pelajar yang mempunyai tahap lebih rendah dalam penguasaan bahasa Inggeris mempunyai pencapaian yang sama secara statistik dengan pelajar-pelajar yang mempunyai tahap penguasaan lebih tinggi dalam menggunakan pesan atau erti dalam tulisan yang disampaikan oleh bentuk-bentuk kata kerja yang terkandung dalam sistem *tense* terbabit ($t = -2.37, p = 0.21$).

Hasil-hasil penyelidikan ini membuktikan bahawa kaedah erti membantu pelajar-pelajar untuk menterjemahkan pengetahuan teori ke dalam pengetahuan praktikal. Hasil-hasil penyelidikan tersebut juga membuktikan bahawa kaedah erti mempunyai kesan yang sama dalam membantu pelajar-pelajar dari golongan yang mempunyai tahap penguasaan bahasa Inggeris yang berbeza untuk memahami dan menggunakan bentuk-bentuk nahu sasaran. Pencapaian lebih baik yang dibuat oleh kumpulan olahan secara jelas menunjukkan adanya hubungan yang kuat antara olahan dengan kualiti pencapaian pelajar dalam memahami dan

menggunakan pesan atau erti yang disampaikan oleh bentuk-bentuk nahu bahasa sasaran.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Every year, tens of thousands of successful Malay students who graduate from upper secondary school seek tertiary education. While a small number is sent abroad, the majority enroll in local universities for undergraduate studies. This latter group of students has to face the reality that most of the local universities use the English language as the main medium of instruction. They have to handle academic tasks and assignments in English. They need to adapt to this new demand as well as a new environment in their academic world. While their adaptation to these new conditions is facilitated by exposure to English, their proficiency may not be at the level necessary to process the content area knowledge offered in academic courses (Cooper, 1984).

Undergraduates who are considered successful learners are those who have a high level of control of the English language particularly where reading skills are concerned since most of the resource materials are in English (Nambiar & Sargunan, 1989). In institutions of higher learning where English is used as the main medium of instruction, the problems faced by the students are more serious. Learners are expected to demonstrate good writing skills in their term papers, project papers and other assignments in English. This involves an ability to look at resource materials more carefully, to extract and verify information, to rephrase



and finally to revise. In fact, this expectation of the academic community becomes a problem for most Malay college students in an ESL environment as they are underprepared for the academic situation.

This existing problem among ESL learners in Malaysian colleges could be a result of the approaches to language instruction at secondary school level. Govindasamy (1994) states that there are at least two types of instructional approaches mostly used in second language classrooms in the Malaysian context which can cause difficulties for learners to cope with higher academic settings. One approach related to language instruction spends an enormous amount of time on acquiring communication skills. Another approach sensitizes learners with the traditional way of learning English: the form (rule)-governed approach.

On gaining entrance to an institution of higher learning, learners are expected to enroll in a preparatory course in English, in order to acquire the needed academic language proficiency. Unfortunately, however, this preparation is frequently less than successful for two reasons—a curriculum which again overemphasizes ‘block’ communication skills and strategies; and a grammar instruction that is traditional in orientation.

The first reason for learners’ poor skills is related to the emphasis on communication skills and strategies. Spending an enormous amount of time on acquiring communication skills and strategies leads to a reduction in the time allocated for grammar (Govindasamy, 1994). Also a focus on direct instruction in

