INTRODUCTION
The language produced by foreign language (FL) learners almost inevitably contains errors of various types (Hemchua and Schmitt, 2006). This is a part of the language learning process. Thus, using error analysis in language learning can predict the learners’ type of errors, as this is useful for developing teaching materials and selecting teaching methods (Kitao and Kitao, 2000). Furthermore, the results of such analysis could be used as indicators of the learners’ achievement. Most learners view error correction as part and parcel of acquiring competency in the language learnt. Leki (1991) in her study on second language written production found that 93% of her first year college students felt that it was very important that grammatical errors be pointed out so that they could try to correct the non-native language in their production.

According to Yarmohammadi (2002), learners may make errors rooted in their mother tongues in the writing process. Richards (1974) defined this type of error as interlingual errors. As indicated by Swan (1997, p. 161), if an English L1 learner of French confuses fenêtre, vitre, vitrine, and vitrail (words for different types of window), it is questionable whether this is due to interlingual causes since the English system does not offer so many forms, or intralingual, because the French lexical system is complicated and there is in fact no English term to transfer.

Whether it is interlingual or intralingual, one of the errors is misformation, which Dulay,
Burt and Krashen (1982, p. 108-109) categorized as the use of wrong form of the morpheme or structure. James (1998) called this type of error misselection, since the error was caused by selecting the wrong words, and not by using the wrong form of words. Duškova (1969) refers to this type of error as ‘distortions’, while Ringbom (1987) calls such errors ‘hybrids’. This type of error was made by learners when they tailored the L1 words to suit the syntactic requirements and/or rules of the L2.

Errors in various forms are important sources of information about second language acquisition, because they demonstrate conclusively that learners do not simply memorize the target language rules and then reproduce them in their utterances. They indicate that learners construct their own rules on the basis of input data, and that in some instances at least, these rules differ from those of the target language learners (Ellis, 1985a, p. 9).

PROBLEM STATEMENT
The French language is linguistically different from most of the main languages in Malaysia, namely Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil, and among the striking differences are the grammar and pronunciation (Hazlina Abdul Halim et al., 2009a). Thus, “due to the incomplete knowledge”, learners will make errors which is “the use of a linguistic item (a word, a grammatical item, a speech act, etc.) in a way a native speaker regards as showing faulty or incomplete learning” (Richards et al., 1992, p. 127).

It is important to note that grammatical gender is the most difficult part of French language to be learnt and taught for Malaysians, since in their mother tongues and dominant languages, the structure is limited to either animate nouns or none at all. Thus, the incomprehension of the French grammatical gender rules has led them to make errors in French.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE
The objective of this study was to identify and analyse the misselection errors (also called misselection errors) made by Malaysian non-native speakers of French as a foreign language with regard to expressing grammatical gender in their writing.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY
This study only focused on the misselection errors of the application of grammatical genders by Malaysian students as well as the misselection errors of choosing grammatical gender elements. It did not include other types of errors, such as additional errors and omission errors. In addition, this study did not take into consideration how the differences and similarities affected the choice of the writing strategies used.

MATERIALS AND PROCEDURES
This study utilized both the quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. The subjects consisted of 2nd and 3rd year foreign language students from different fields of humanities and social sciences at Universiti Putra Malaysia. A total of 40 subjects aged between 20 and 24 participated in this study after having 100 hours of learning French. Note that factors such as gender and race were not controlled in this study. The instrument used in the study was the completion of two writing tasks by the subjects. The first essay consisted of writing activities in the past, and in the writing, the students were to be a male. For the second essay, the same topic was given, but this time, the students were to be a female. The purpose was to see whether the students correctly use grammatical gender in the adjectives and past tenses. It was also due to the initial observations by the researcher that the two topics (which was the utilisation of adjectives in French and past tenses) were the main areas where Malaysian students made a considerable number of misselection errors in applying the French grammatical gender.
Grammatical Gender Misselection and Related Errors in French Writing by Malaysian Students

**FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

Overall, 800 sentences were analyzed and these represented 400 sentences from Essay 1 and 400 sentences from Essay 2 (a rough estimation on the minimum sentences for the two essays (20 sentences) multiplied by the number of respondents, i.e. 40). The researcher observed that 90% of the sentences made by the students in the two tasks were sentences with simple gender application (which involved nouns and adjectives but with only one application of grammatical gender) and only 10% were sentences with complex grammatical applications (which involved nouns, adjectives, prepositions etc. and with more than one application of grammatical gender to be considered).

Listed in Fig. 1 are the results of the two writing tasks given.

The study found 17.1% of misselection errors of grammatical gender application. These were the most dominant errors in this study. The misselection errors involved were the errors involving the use of nouns, preposition and adjectives.

**Misselection Errors on French Prepositions**

Table 1 shows few examples of the misselection errors of the French prepositions made by Malaysian students.

Most of the misselection errors were in the forms of French prepositions, the noun articles of a country and the mode of transport in French. The errors occurred when the students generalised the utilisation of prepositions for the countries in the same manner as they applied them to other places (for example the name of the roads, building names, etc.).

From the study, it was found that the errors were due to the influence of the students’ mother tongue (Malay) or their second language (English). In both languages, we could observe that the prepositions *to* (in English) and *ke* (in Malay) are the same for countries and places. For example, in English, the preposition *to* is used as follows:

1. I went *to* Italy last week
2. I went *to* Petaling Street last week

In French, for names of countries, one has to take into account the grammatical gender.
of the countries in order to determine which preposition to be used. A feminine country (e.g. Malaysia) will use the preposition *en* to indicate *to*, similarly for the masculine countries, in which the preposition *au* is used. For proper names such as the names of buildings and roads (in most cases), the gender will not be taken into account. As such, the prepositions *en, au, aux* and *à* are used to indicate *to*. Below are some examples of this usage:

From the examples shown in Table 2, we can see that in both Malay and English languages, the same prepositions (*to* and *ke*) were used to indicate ‘to’. This was the reason why Malaysian students made misselection errors in French prepositions, i.e. they reverted to their knowledge of the English or Malay language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French sentences by Malaysian students</th>
<th>Appropriate phrases in French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Je vais à l’école *au* velo.  
(*I went to school by bicycle*) | Je vais à l’école *à* vélo. |
| 2. Je suis allé *au* train.  
(*I went by train*) | Je suis allé *en* train. |
(*I live in Thailand*) | J’habite *en* Thaïlande. |
| 4. Je suis allé *à* Indonésie en décembre.  
(*I went to Indonesia in December*) | Je suis allé *en* Indonésie en décembre |
| 5. Après, nous ont mangés *à* restaurant *dans la KLCC*  
(*Later, we ate at a restaurant in KLCC*) | Après, nous ont mangés *au* restaurant *à KLCC* |
| 6. Nous allons *à* marché.  
(*We go to the market*) | Nous allons *au* marché. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Malay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Je suis allée <em>en</em> Italie la semaine dernière (feminine)</td>
<td>I went <em>to</em> Italy last week</td>
<td>Saya pergi <em>ke</em> Itali pada minggu lepas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J’irai <em>au</em> Portugal demain (masculine)</td>
<td>I will go <em>to</em> Portugal</td>
<td>Saya akan pergi <em>ke</em> Portugal esok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J’ai voyagé <em>aux</em> Etats-Unis la semaine dernière (plural, no gender form)</td>
<td>I travelled <em>to</em> the States last week</td>
<td>Saya melancong <em>ke</em> Amerika pada minggu lepas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Je suis allé(e) <em>à</em> Petaling Street la semaine dernière (masculine/feminine)</td>
<td>I went <em>to</em> Petaling Street last week</td>
<td>Saya pergi <em>ke</em> Petaling Street pada minggu lepas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Misselection Errors of the French Verbs

Table 3 shows a few samples of the misselection errors of verbs in French.

The misselection errors of the French verbs made by Malaysian students were closely related to the usage of the French simple past tense or passé composé. In more specific, the errors made by the students involved choosing the right auxiliary to go with the second component of the passé composé. In the first error example, the choice of auxiliary être for the verb passer in the sentence “Je suis passée un bonne journée” makes the sentence grammatically wrong. In French, the meaning of the verb passer in past tense is dependent on the choice of the auxiliary used. If it is combined with the auxiliary être, the meaning would be the action of passing-by an area, whereas if it is combined with the auxiliary avoir, it brings the meaning to spend (as in Example 1).

Meanwhile, the errors for the verb aller (to go) in the French simple past tense mainly involve the incomprenhension of the rule of applying the past participle to the verbs which need être as an auxiliary. In French, the application of the auxiliary être in the simple past tense (passé composé) involves 14 verbs (excluding the reflective verbs), including the verb aller as used by the respondent in the sentence. In the application of this verb, whenever the verb être is used, one will have to take into consideration the grammatical gender that is related with the subject pronoun used.

Example:

Il est allé au magasin hier (he went to the shop yesterday)

Elle est allée au magasin hier (she went to the shop yesterday)

From the example given, if the subject pronoun is masculine (in this case il), the past participle used will have be the masculine participle (allé). Likewise, if the subject pronoun is feminine (here, it is elle), the past participle will follow the feminine form, and thus, one will have to add e to the participle (allé → allée).

In Sentence 2 (Table 3), the error made by the student was the misselection of the auxiliary avoir combined with the verb aller and not the auxiliary être, as it was supposed to be. The application of the auxiliary avoir (where the grammatical gender of the subject pronoun was not considered) was the reason for the misselection error of the grammatical gender for the participle used.

Based on the error produced, the researcher concluded that the respondents understood the concept of grammatical gender attribution for the 14 verbs which used the auxiliary être for the past tense. Nevertheless, this comprehension was not applied to the choice of the auxiliary for those verbs. The error was due to the “ignorance of rules restrictions” and also an “incomplete application of rules” as elaborated by Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982, p. 156).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French sentences by Malaysian students</th>
<th>Appropriate phrases in French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Je suis passée un bonne journée.</td>
<td>J’ai passé une bonne journée</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(I spent a good day)</td>
<td>Pendant les dernières vacances, je suis allée à Terengganu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Pendant les dernières vacances, j’ai allée à Terengganu.</td>
<td>Je suis allé à Kuala Lumpur la semaine dernière</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. J’ai allé à Kuala Lumpur la dernière semaine</td>
<td>(I went to Kuala Lumpur last week)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 3
Some example of the misselection errors of French prepositions
Misselection Errors of the French Adjectives

Table 4 presents some of the French adjective misselection errors made by Malaysian students in their writing.

In the sentence “Kuala Lumpur est beau ville”, it was observed that to get the message across, the student used interlanguage. The misselection error of the adjective is also traceable to the influence of their second language (English). In this sentence, the student adapted the adjective beautiful in English, without being aware that the adjective was associated to the noun ville (town) which is feminine. The correct adjective to be used should be belle which is the feminine of the adjective beau. The researcher felt that it might be due to the fact that the student did not know that the noun ville is actually feminine, and therefore, the feminine form should be used. It may also be due to the approximation of the noun form to English, and in this case beau is closer to beautiful than the adjective belle.

The error on the adjective jolie (pretty) was due to English language or the respondent’s mother tongue influence, which associates the adjective pretty with a feminine noun. With this in mind, the additional –e to the adjective jolie by the respondent did not take into account the gender of the noun it is associated with. In both languages, the said adjective is associated, and in most cases, with a noun that is feminine.

The Misselection Errors of the Articles and Prepositions

Table 5 shows a few examples of the errors of the French articles and prepositions by Malaysian students.

The misselection errors of the French articles by Malaysian students were mainly due to over-generalisation of the rules from their L1 and L2, for which Yarmohammadi (2002: 27) pointed out that “under the influence of the mother tongue the differences between L1 and L2 are transferred into the learner’s language – i.e. interlanguage – hence, interference is created and certain deviant structures are generated.”

Another misselection error observed by the researcher was the misselection of the French article. The researcher observed that this was due to the respondents’ dominant language, and their daily discourse. In the sentence, “J’ai mangée un gateaux”, the respondent might be translating the sentence “I have eaten a cake” or in Malay “saya telah makan satu kuih”, which was a common Malaysian discourse, even though what they were trying to say was “I ate some cake” or in Malay “saya telah

Table 4
Example of misselection errors of French adjectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French sentences by Malaysian students</th>
<th>Appropriate phrases in French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. La cuisine au restaurant est très délicieux. (The food at the restaurant is very delicious)</td>
<td>La cuisine au restaurant est très délicieuse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Le pull est très joli. (The sweater is very beautiful)</td>
<td>Le pull est très joli.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. L’hôtel est très joli. (The hotel is very beautiful)</td>
<td>L’hôtel est très joli.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. London est grande. (London is big)</td>
<td>London est grand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Kuala Lumpur est beau ville. (Kuala Lumpur is a beautiful town)</td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur est une belle ville.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grammatical Gender Misselection and Related Errors in French Writing by Malaysian Students

Some example of the misselection errors of the French articles and prepositions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French sentences by Malaysian students</th>
<th>Appropriate phrases in French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Pendant le dernières vacances, j’ai allée voyager à Singapore. (During the school holidays, I travelled to Singapore)</td>
<td>Pendant les dernières vacances, je suis allée voyager à Singapour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Je suis passée un bonne journée (I have spent a good day)</td>
<td>J’ai passé une bonne journée</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Après, nous ont mangés à restaurant dans la KLCC (Later, we ate at the restaurant in KLCC)</td>
<td>Après, nous avons mangé au restaurant à KLCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Je suis allé à la cinéma avec ma sœur. (I went to the cinema with my sister)</td>
<td>Je suis allé au cinéma avec ma sœur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. La cuisine de cet restaurant est excellent. (The food in this restaurant is excellent.)</td>
<td>La cuisine de ce restaurant est excellent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Misselection Errors of Lexis

For the misselection error of the lexis, the selection of the noun location was actually a direct translation from English by the students in adapting the noun by inserting the definite article le. In this case, it was an interlingual error illustrating “when the required TL item is unknown and the learner borrows an L1 substitute, the consequence is an L1 transfer error” (James, 1998, p. 175). The students did not realise that the noun location was faux-amí in French. It is important to note that although

makan sedikit kuih”. In the French language, partitive du would be more suitable to be used for translating the sentence, “J’ai mangée un gateaux [the appropriate phrase in French is j’ai mange un gâteau], to convey the same meaning in English or Malay. When the respondent wrote J’ai mangée un gateaux [the appropriate phrase in French is j’ai mange un gâteau], the meaning was ‘I have eaten the whole cake’ or in Malay “saya telah makan keseluruhan kek itu”, and the researcher believed that it was not what the respondent intended to say.
the spelling is the same in French and in English, it does not bring the same meaning in the two languages. In English, the meaning is the location of a place, but in French, it means “hiring something”. Therefore, the sentence “j’aime le location de ma maison” meant “I like the act of hiring my house” instead of the intended meaning, “I like the location of my house”.

OVERALL FINDINGS

This study explored the grammatical gender misselection errors made by Malaysian students in their French proficiency writing course. The study revealed that the misselection errors were the dominant errors made by the students. Apart from the “ignorance of rules restrictions” and also an “incomplete application of rules”, the errors were also interlingual errors which were influenced by their mother tongue (Malay) and second language (English).

Lastly, the errors committed were also due to the fact that the students foreignized the lexical items from English, when a word in English was familiar or close to a French word. Hence, the students took it for granted that the meaning should be the same without any further check.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, this study, which adopted the misselection error definition by Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982), attempted to find the errors made by Malaysian non-native speakers of French in their writing. This exploratory study on error analysis is useful for both learners and teachers of French as a second or foreign language. The result of this study can assist the learners to acquire a better understanding of the target language and future studies by identifying specific errors made learners and how they should correct them by knowing, understanding and avoiding such errors. Similarly, this exploratory study is useful for teachers, as it can help them identify which point and why learners committed the specific errors. This study can also help teachers who are involved in the important task of curriculum development as error analysis can be helpful for syllabus design and teaching (Hongquan and Kikuko, 2007). Finally, an understanding of the causes of errors will help teachers emphasize grammatical points so as to reduce chances of students making such errors.

REFERENCES


