



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***ERROR ANALYSIS IN GERMAN WRITING BY CHINESE MALAYSIAN
STUDENTS***

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ERROR ANALYSIS IN GERMAN WRITING BY CHINESE MALAYSIAN STUDENTS

By

TAN WAN TING

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

May 2016

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

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May 2016

Chair : Nicole Ogasa, PhD
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Transfer from a pre-existing linguistic repertoire to a target language is an important issue in foreign language acquisition. There are limited studies focusing on common German grammatical errors in the written form, both morphological and syntactical, that are made by Chinese Malaysian students in the Malaysia context. Furthermore, the correlation of these errors with structural differences between the students' linguistic repertoire and the target language, i.e. German language should be given attention. The principal objective of this study is to ascertain the direct correlation between the influence of the students' dominant language (Chinese) and the language of instruction (English) with the extent of grammatical errors made whilst acquiring the German language. Twenty Chinese Malaysian students participated in this study, and the data were collected from their compositions. The respondents were Chinese Malaysian students from the International Education College who have Chinese as their first language. The ungrammatical structures found in the written compositions of the students were analysed. This study used Contrastive Analysis to examine the differences between Mandarin Chinese, English and German. Error Analysis was used to identify the errors that had been made by the participants. This study was designed by the author based on the Interlanguage Theory. Common grammatical errors were categorised and analysed. The research findings prove that the learners were confused by the difficulties in German grammar. The study also reveals that the sources of errors were also intralingual and not just interlingual. Error Analysis provides information on the effectiveness of the teaching and the weakness of the participants. The results also reveal errors other than grammatical errors which should be given attention by the instructors or academics. The findings can help to enhance the teaching and learning of German as a foreign language in a class attended by learners who have Chinese and English as their previously acquired languages. This study also provides an insight into the nature of the learners' erroneous sentence construction.

Keywords: error analysis, interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, grammatical error, Chinese-English-German

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sastera

ANALISIS KESILAPAN DALAM PENULISAN BAHASA JERMAN OLEH PELAJAR BERBANGSA CINA DI MALAYSIA

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Pemindahan daripada bahasa asal seseorang ke bahasa sasaran adalah satu isu yang penting dalam pembelajaran bahasa asing. Terdapat hanya kajian terhad yang memberikan tumpuan kepada kesilapan tatabahasa Jerman dalam bentuk bertulis, sama ada dari segi morfologi dan sintaksis yang dilakukan oleh pelajar Malaysia yang berbangsa Cina. Tambahan pula, hubung kait kesilapan-kesilapan dengan perbezaan struktur antara Bahasa yang telah dikuasai dengan bahasa sasaran seperti Bahasa Jerman harus diberikan tumpuan. Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk menentukan hubung kait langsung antara pengaruh bahasa dominan pelajar (bahasa Cina) dan bahasa pengantar (bahasa Inggeris) berdasarkan takat kesilapan tatabahasa yang dibuat ketika melalui proses pembelajaran bahasa Jerman. Seramai dua puluh orang pelajar Malaysia yang berbangsa Cina telah terlibat dalam kajian ini, dan data telah dikumpulkan daripada hasil karangan mereka. Responden-responden terdiri daripada pelajar Malaysia berbangsa Cina dari Kolej Pendidikan Antarabangsa (INTEC) dan bahasa pertama mereka (L1) adalah bahasa Cina. Kesalahan struktur gramatik yang dibuat oleh pelajar-pelajar tersebut telah dianalisis melalui hasil penulisan karangan mereka yang telah direka untuk kajian ini. Kajian ini menggunakan Analisis Kontrastif untuk mengkaji perbezaan antara bahasa Cina, Inggeris dan Jerman. Analisis Kesilapan pula telah digunakan untuk mengenal pasti kesilapan tatabahasa yang telah dibuat oleh pelajar. Kajian ini dijalankan berdasarkan Teori Bahasa Antara. Kesilapan tatabahasa umum telah dikategorikan dan dianalisis. Hasil kajian ini membuktikan bahawa wujud kekeliruan dalam mempelajari tatabahasa Jerman. Hasil kajian juga menunjukkan bukan sahaja interlingual dikesan, manakala intralingual juga dikesan. Analisis Kesilapan memberi maklumat tentang keberkesanan pengajaran dan kelemahan peserta. Hasil kajian juga mengenali kesalahan selain daripada tatabahasa yang perlu diperhatikan oleh pengajar atau ahli akademik. Hasil kajian ini boleh mempertingkatkan kecekapan proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa Jerman sebagai bahasa asing kepada tenaga pengajar dan pelajar yang telah menguasai bahasa Cina dan bahasa Inggeris. Selain itu, kajian ini juga memberikan gambaran mengenai corak kesalahan pembentukan ayat yang lazim dilakukan oleh para pelajar.

Kata kunci: Analisis kesilapan, pemindahan interlingual, pemindahan intralingual, kesilapan gramatik, bahasa Cina-bahasa Ingeris-bahasa Jerman



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BM	Bahasa Malaysia
CA	Contrastive Analysis
CAH	Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis
CL	classifier
CLI	Cross-linguistic Influence
CRS	currently relevant state
CSC	Complex Stative Construction
DUR	Duration aspect
GEN	Genitive
IL	Interlanguage
INTEC	International Education College
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
L3	Third Language
L4	Fourth Language
NL	Native Language
NOM	Nominalizer
NEG	negation marker
PFV	Perfective aspect
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SVA	Subject-verb agreement
SVO	subject-verb-object
TL	Target Language

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

According to the web edition of Ethnologue 2015, 7102 living languages exist in the world (Lewis et al., 2015). The main language that Malaysians have to acquire is Malay or Bahasa Malaysia (BM). BM has the status of the official language of Malaysia and is fully employed for official government purposes. Based on Article 152 of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia, the status of English is as the second language in Malaysia (Jalaluddin, Norsimah, & Kesumawati, 2008). English, as the second language (L2) learned by Malaysians, is used for certain official purposes which requires bilingual communication. These can range from legal proceedings to business transactions. Besides Bahasa Malaysia and English, most Chinese Malaysians naturally acquire incidentally one Chinese language as their first language (L1) at home. Therefore, Bahasa Malaysia and English are additional languages besides their mother tongue. The current Prime Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak (2012), encouraged students to be multilingual in this competitive century because those who know at least one or more additional languages have more advantages than those who are monolingual. In addition to that, students who learn new languages can gain insight into the cultures of the people who speak these languages. Becoming a multilingual person who displays cultural understanding is important for the success of an individual in a competitive society that is heavily influenced by the inevitable waves of globalization.

Previous literature indicates that the field of additional language acquisition has been widely discussed and investigated by researchers to improve the acquisition of additional languages. Ellis (1994) is one of the linguists who stressed that a language which is acquired after the L1 is classified as an L2. Besides that, Gass & Selinker (2008, p.7) also highlighted that the acquisition of L3, L4, or additional languages is defined as Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Various linguists have different opinions towards the acquisition of additional languages. Although any language learned after L1 has been classified as L2 by some researchers, it is being examined because the processes of acquiring any additional languages after L2 are different with the process of SLA. L2 or target language were defined by Stefánsson (2013) as any other language apart from L1. Hence, L2 or target language is viewed as a language which is in the process of learning in this study.

Jessner (2008) highlighted that the process of learning French and/or Spanish as foreign languages after English in the German and Austria school system is known as third language acquisition (TLA). The explanation of TLA by Jessner (2008) shows that any subsequent language acquisition beyond the second foreign language acquisition is known as TLA. The acquisition of German by Chinese Malaysians in this study is viewed as TLA because German is the foreign language that learnt by Chinese Malaysians after English.

1.1 Background of the Study

Malaysians have the opportunity to learn many different foreign languages such as Spanish, Japanese, Korean, French, Russian, and etc. via classes and courses available in both government and private academic institutions. One of the major foreign languages available to Malaysian students is German. Over the past few years, the number of German learners in Singapore and Malaysia has increased from 38% to 77% (*Ständige Arbeitsgruppe Deutsch als Fremdsprache*, 2015, p. 33). Learners have different objectives and motivations for acquiring German. Such motivations may include career, marriage or for academic purposes. There are several universities, colleges, and institutes offering German language courses to those who are interested in acquiring German. For example, the Goethe Institute offers a number of German language courses. Such courses are of high quality because experienced teachers are employed by the institute.

Şimşek (2006) states that the influence of each language system will change in weight depending on the language area that is investigated. Researchers found out that recency, proficiency, perception of language typology, and language distance are the factors affecting cross linguistic influence in target language acquisition. (e.g. Williams & Hammarberg, 1998; Ortega, 2008; Cenoz, 2001). Therefore, English was focused and Bahasa Malaysia was exempted because of recency of use plays an important role in the production of the target language. Hammarberg's (2001) study revealed that a significant factor where his informant transferred more from the foreign language she most recently used. It provide the information which one of the linguistic repertoire was used recently is important in TL production. Based on the information which had provided by the participants, they used English most of the time at International Education College (INTEC) and less Bahasa Malaysia in their daily life. Most of the time they speak English with friends at INTEC. Besides that, participants also realise that their linguistic repertoire which includes Chinese and English have greater influence when they construct German sentences. Besides that, Kafes (2011) pointed out that the role of L1 is important while acquiring foreign languages. Therefore, in the study, the author has focused on the influence of L1 (Chinese) in German language acquisition.

The initial inspiration for the topic of this study was provided by author's own learning experience as a German language learner who majored in German as a foreign language at Universiti Putra Malaysia. As a native speaker of Chinese, the author was always influenced by her mother tongue when learning German. Besides that, English was the medium of instruction in class. Therefore, the author was aware that her mother tongue and English always influenced her during the learning process. With all the curiosity and concerns regarding the problems that the author faced in her foreign language acquisition process, she decided to investigate what is happening in the minds of the Chinese Malaysian learners with regards to syntactic and morphological comprehension during German language acquisition, placing emphasis in its written form. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the influence of linguistic repertoire on Chinese Malaysian participants and to find out its impact on their German language acquisition.

Over the years plenty of materials on Error Analysis have appeared. Error Analysis identify and explain errors made by learners during target language acquisition. The analysis of errors produced by second language learners of English have been widely investigated by researchers. After identifying learners' errors, determining the sources of those errors is important to explain the error occurrence (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). Two linguistic factors are attributed as the sources of error occurrence and they are interlingual and intralingual interferences. The process of language learning is generally affected by these two sources. The errors caused by the influence of the linguistic system of L1 on the production of the TL are called interlingual errors. They are defined by Al-khresheh (2010) as the negative influence of L1's linguistic features on TL. Besides that, Al-khresheh (2016) defined intralingual errors as the errors which are not influenced by the structure of the L1 but are caused by the featured of TL itself.

Previous research found that the transfer from L1 to TL is not the only cause for errors to occur. There are other causes such as overgeneralisation, incomplete application, ignorance of the rule and others. During the EA of Iranian EFL learners' writing, Rostami Abusaeedi and Boroomand (2015) discovered that the errors were due to the imperfect acquisition of the TL, that is the errors were caused by intralingual interference, while interlingual interference only constituted a small proportion of the errors.

Huo (2013) mentioned that finding out the differences between Chinese and German is useful for teaching purposes as it can reduce the interference of Chinese during German language acquisition. Some Chinese Malaysian students have acquired Chinese, English, and Bahasa Malaysia before learning German. As such, they will produce numerous ungrammatical structures in the written form of the German language due to the differences and similarities between the previously acquired languages and German. However, only Chinese and English would be focused in this study because Chinese is the dominant language of the participants and English is the medium of instruction at college and the German language classes. Therefore, the ungrammatical written form of the German structures made by participants would be analysed. We will infer that ungrammatical structures may occur due to the interference of the learners' linguistic repertoire on the German syntactic & morphological rules. The following example clearly shows how this phenomenon occurs.

Example:

Table 1: Differences between Chinese, English and German

Types of Language	Sentences
Chinese	我 昨天 已经 吃了你的 蛋糕。 wǒ zuótiān yǐjīng chī le nǐ de dàngāo I yesterday already eat CRS you GEN cake
English	Yesterday, I already ate your cake.
German	*Gestern, ich esste dein Kuchen. Yesterday I ate your cake. (Correction: Gestern habe ich deinen Kuchen gegessen.) Yesterday have I your cake eaten.

*Incorrect sentence with grammatical errors

From the identified errors, we can determine that the occurrences of grammatical errors have been caused by either interlingual or intralingual influence.

Table 2: Explanation of Errors Occurrence

Errors	Explanation
Comma	If the adverb is in the first position, there is no comma after the adverb. It is not like English where a comma is needed after the adverb.
Tenses	Source: Intralingual The error “esste” shows that the learner knows that the verb should be use one of the tenses, but he/she didn’t know the correct form. Therefore, the learner overgeneralized the rule. For most verbs, you just need to add suffix –te to show the action is in past tense for third person singular. However, the perfect tense is used in this sentence.
Cases	Source: Intralingual One of the sources which caused this error is intralingual. The learner might forget the gender for “Kuchen”, so he/she might think the gender of “Kuchen” is neutral. The suffix is not needed for possessive pronoun which is followed by a neutral

	noun in accusative case Therefore, this type of error could be classified into case error and gender error.
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Summary: The occurrence of errors might be the lack of skills or the low level of linguistic knowledge of the learner. The other factor might be the influence of non-existing rules in the previously acquired languages of the participants which made them to forget the rules of the target language.

The ungrammatical structures committed by the German learners, especially in certain aspect usage, is a cause for concern in the acquisition of German as a foreign language. The usage of grammatical accuracy is important because inaccuracy could lead to misunderstanding or failure. Therefore, grammatical errors should be focused and investigated.

1.2 Problems of the Study

There was not much research conducted that focussed on cross linguistic influence in the German language acquisition by Malaysian learners. However, one such research was done by Kärchner-Ober who did research on cross linguistic influence of her students in Universiti Putra Malaysia. Kärchner-Ober (2009) pointed out that the participants in her study applied their knowledge of imperfect English in the production in German while their imperfect English was caused by the negative transfer of their L1 (Bahasa Malaysia). Therefore, the influence of L1 on L2 causes the imperfect L2 influence on L3. The imperfect English has caused a negative transfer in German language production. Besides that, she stated that for Chinese participants, there was an invisible transfer from Chinese to German acquisition. However, Kärchner-Ober's study (2009) did not fully explain how Chinese participants' transferred directly from their L1 (Chinese) to German, as well as for the Indian and Kadazan participants in the study. The researcher only placed emphasis on how Chinese, Indian, Malay, and Kadazan participants transferred from Bahasa Malaysia to English and English to German. There is a limitation in the study because it did not focus on the influence of the participants' first language (like Chinese) in German language acquisition, although most participants in the study were Malaysian Chinese.

Based on Kärchner-Ober's study (2009), it was revealed that an individual's L1 and English plays an important role in cross-linguistic influence in German language acquisition. English is widely used in Malaysia due to its official second language status. Moreover, it has a global status as the de facto language of human communication in general. However, Sekharan Nair et al. (2012) pointed out that fresh graduates in Malaysia have a low proficiency in English. One of the factors that cause fresh graduates in Malaysia to have a low proficiency in English is the influenced of the learners' L1. L1 has been proven to have a primary role in second language

acquisition. Therefore, the linguistic systems acquired by a learner can be observed to have a connection with each other.

Chinese Malaysian students face major problems during the acquisition of Germanic languages such as English, German, Dutch, and so on. For example, Chinese Malaysians have difficulties in acquiring the articles of the English language because articles do not exist in the Chinese linguistic system. Chinese categorizes nouns in different ways as compared to Germanic languages. To a certain extent, the non-existence of articles in L1 (Chinese) influenced the acquisition of English definite articles (Wong & Quek, 2007) by Chinese L1 speakers. Studies revealed that the differences between English and Chinese were the main cause of the difficulty in acquiring English definite articles. Further studies on the differences between Chinese, English, and German are required because there is a lack of studies investigating the differences among these 3 languages.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The aim of this research is to determine common German grammatical errors made by Chinese Malaysian students who are learning German as a foreign language at INTEC. There errors could be due to cross linguistic influences or interference of Chinese and English on German language acquisition. The participants know Chinese, Bahasa Malaysia, English and German language. Chinese is the dominant language used by the participants and English is the medium of instruction in the class. They tend to use less Bahasa Malaysia as compared to Chinese and English in their daily lives. Therefore, the interference caused by Chinese and English in their German language acquisition will be focused. Language transfer, linguistic interference, and the role of Chinese and English in acquiring German language are the focus of this study. German learners make errors in written and spoken form even though they are aware that German is different from the previous languages that they have acquired. The study aims to describe the ungrammatical German structures in the written form that were composed by the participants. These ungrammatical structures are caused by the differences between Chinese, English, and German language.

Another aim of this research project is to investigate the sources that caused the ungrammatical forms. There are other sources other than language transfer that may cause the errors. Numerous sources of errors have been highlighted by researchers. However, a clear explanation and classification of the errors into different sources should be made. In this study, interlingual and intralingual are the sources which were determined. Many researches used these two sources to explain why the errors occurred (Norfazlika Abd. Karim, 2013; Khodabandeh, 2007). Shekhzadeh & Gheichi (2011) defined interlingual interference as the source of errors linked to previously acquired languages. The linguistic system or rules of L1 or L2 will be applied to the learners' TL. Wang (2009) defined intralingual interference as the source of errors originating from the rules of the TL. In this study, the linguistic repertoire of the participants is taken into account because before learning German language, the participants have already acquired Bahasa Malaysia, English and Chinese.

The study comes out of the need to investigate how Chinese Malaysians produce the written form of German which contains grammatical errors. The German language is one of the languages that the INTEC students are required to pass before proceeding to further their education in Germany. They need to take a test which called DSH. DSH stands for “*Deutsche Sprachprüfung für den Hochschulzugang ausländischer Studienbewerber*”. This is a German language proficiency test. To obtain DSH, students need to acquire the B2 level. Students are required to take the test before entry into a German university. For this study, the participants were attending an intensive German language course to take the test. When the students participated in this study, their levels were between A2 and B1. Appendix 5 gives an explanation of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages from A1 to C2

This study is carried out to identify, analyse, categorize, and describe Malaysian Chinese students’ errors in German free writing compositions at a grammatical level. It aims to find out the sources of those errors. The differences between Chinese, English, and German at a morphological and syntactical level were focused.

1.4 Research Questions

It is important to extend the study to discover the interlanguage involved during German language acquisition by Malaysian Chinese. This study is to explore the influence of previous languages knowledge in German language acquisition. Based on the background of the study, the following research questions are identified.

1. What are the common grammatical errors made by Chinese Malaysian students while acquiring the German language?
2. What sources of common grammatical error can be identified in reference to interlingual and intralingual influences?
3. How does the influence of Chinese and English show in the interlanguage of the participants’ German?

1.5 Significance of the study

This study can contribute to the improvement of the teaching and learning of the German language at beginning level. It will identify the factors which cause the grammatical errors to occur. This is carried out based on a reference list containing all identified, classified, and described ungrammatical structures made by German learners. Yang (2010) points out that error analysis describe the data of a learner’s unsuccessful language by providing the incidence, nature, causes and consequences of the errors. This study will also identify the level of achievement of Malaysian Chinese students’ German writing skills and assist them in the process of acquiring German as a foreign language.

The grammatical errors made by the participants would be analysed in this research. Lecturers and teachers may focus more on the ungrammatical structures which have been analysed and adopt appropriate methods or approaches of teaching German as a foreign language to Chinese Malaysian students. This can help students to be more cautious when they write a text in German. This study may enhance the writing skills of German learners with a Chinese Malaysian background.

This study would present the steps on how to conduct the study using Error Analysis and the process to investigate the types and sources of errors. This study may later be extended to identify more German writings by more learners with different linguistic repertoire. The findings of the study may not only benefit learners and educators, but also inspire researchers. The method of analysis and the results of the study may be used as a reference for those who are interested in conducting a study of EA.

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