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A study of verb tense problems found in the writings of Malay speakers

Faridah Noor Mohd. Noor

Iowa State University

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A study of verb tense problems
found in the writings of
Malay speakers

by

Faridah Noor Mohd. Noor

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

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Approved:

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine the verb tense problems in the writing of learners of English as a Second Language (ESL). The methodology that will be employed in the study will that of error analysis.

Error analysis is a relatively new technique used in the study of second language learning, but it has been proven to be a useful tool for discovering the types of errors made by second language learners and examining the causes of these errors. Analysis of the errors has enabled linguists to study the strategies of learning used by second language learners.

In general, the steps involved in error analysis that will be followed in the present study are identification of errors, description of errors, and explanation of the causes of these errors. The third step is the ultimate objective for employing error analysis in a study. The first aim is to find out and clarify what and how a learner learns when he studies a second language. The second aim is to use this knowledge that we have gained from the study of his errors to guide and help him learn more efficiently.¹ The first aim described will be the main objective of this study. Pedagogical recommendations will be given to meet the second aim.

Verb tenses will be studied in the present study because
problems in this area persist even for ESL learners who have reached high levels of proficiency. It has been found that error rates in verb tense do not decrease as expected with increased level of proficiency.\(^2\) This study will examine the causes of this "stagnant" state of error rates in the writing of adult native speakers of Malay.

The corpus of the study will be compositions written by the Malay speakers. The compositions were impromptu where they wrote without any preparation prior to the actual writing time. These compositions should exhibit their knowledge of the English tense-aspect system.

The compositions will be analyzed for every verb tense usage. The errors will be tabulated and divided into errors in choice and errors in form. Errors in choice are errors due to incorrect choice of tense while errors in form will be incorrect formation of verb tenses. The compositions will be analyzed at the discourse level and not at the sentence by sentence level. The tense that is initiated should be maintained until it is exhausted before going on to another tense.\(^3\) Inability to maintain a tense will be considered an error in choice.

Certain hypotheses about the verb tense usage by Malay speakers will be tested in the study.
CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, literature relevant to the present study is presented in the following sections: (i) The Study of Error, (ii) Studies of Verb Tense Problems, (iii) Transfer, and (iv) Studies of English Used in Singapore.

The Study of Error

Today, errors constitute a vital part of data in the study of language acquisition and production of language by learners both in the spoken and written forms of language. In the past, errors were considered "annoying, distracting, but inevitable by-products of the process of learning a language." This attitude changed with the application of linguistic and psychological theory in the study of second language learning in the middle of this century.

The main contribution of this theory to second language learning is the Contrastive Analysis (CA) theory which claims that the main obstacle in second language learning is the interference of the systems of the first language. This hypothesis also claims that it is possible to predict the difficulties a learner would encounter by comparing the structures of the two contact languages. Structures
that are similar will be easier to learn but those that differ will be harder. This is the stronger version of CA which has the most predictive power for the phonological component of a language and the least for the grammatical component of a language.

This strong version of CA has been criticized for incorrect predictions of learner difficulties; some of the predicted difficulties did not occur while some that were not predicted did. Whitman and Jackson offered the most convincing criticism of this version of CA. They tested empirically the predictions of the CA hypothesis by applying four separate contrastive analyses including that of Stockwell, Bowen, and Martin. They administered a forty-item test of English grammar to 2,500 Japanese speakers. They did not find any support for the predictions made by the contrastive analyses which were so carefully worked out by the linguists. Whitman and Jackson concluded that "contrastive analysis, as represented by the four analyses tested in this project, is inadequate, theoretically and practically, to predict the interference problems of a language learner."

Wardhaugh supports the claim that the stronger version of CA is "unrealistic and unpredictable." However, he asserts that the weaker version of CA has possibilities for usefulness. In the weaker version, what is required of the investigator is "to use the best linguistic knowledge
available to him in order to account for observed difficulties. It does not require ... the prediction of the difficulties and, conversely, of those learning points which did not create any difficulties at all."\(^9\)

In the weaker version of CA, errors are first tabulated and then followed by comparison of structures in the two contact languages which caused the errors to be made. As pointed out earlier by Wardhaugh, this is a shortcut to the elaborate work demanded by the stronger version. Errors are more profitably explained by considering them a posteriori -- after the fact.\(^10\) However, it does acknowledge that interference exists and is one of the causes of errors in second language learning.

The weaker version of CA is a part of the more encompassing field of error analysis which deals with "the difference between the way people learning a language speak, and the way adult native speakers of the language use the language."\(^11\) Those who are in favor of this approach point out that too much attention is paid to predicting what learners would do instead of observing what learners actually do in the CA approach.

Applying error analysis in the study of second language learning has provided evidence that there are other sources of errors besides interference. Some of the errors pointed out by Richards are intralingual and developmental caused by overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions,
incomplete application of rules, and hypothesizing false concepts. 12

Overgeneralization is when the learner forms deviant structures on the basis of his knowledge of other structures in the target language. Ignorance of rule restrictions is when the learner is applying rules where they do not apply. Incomplete application of rules is when the learner applies only part of the rule and usually just enough to communicate his ideas. This strategy also represents the degree of rule development in the learner. False concepts are hypothesized when the learner does not understand the distinctions of structures in the target language.

While error analysis has enabled linguists and teachers to gain insight into the cause of errors and into strategies of learning, it is not without weaknesses. One of them is pointed out by Schachter in her study of relative clause formation where error analysis has failed to account for avoidance strategy used by the subjects to lower their error rates. 13 However, she does not dismiss the usefulness of this approach and concludes that when applied with a combination of other approaches, like CA a priori predictions and comprehension testing, valuable information on second language learning processes can be accumulated.

Another weakness of error analysis is that teachers tend to concentrate so much on lowering error rates of the second language learner that the main point and
aim of language learning, that of communicative competence, may be overlooked. Another potential danger of error analysis is over stressing of production data so that the importance of comprehension data is disregarded. Language learning is a combination of speaking and listening, writing and reading. The learner's total performance is needed and should be monitored for a successful language learning experience.

The application of CA and error analysis in second language learning has provided insight into the process of second language learning. Teachers and linguists have come to understand that second language learning is just as creative as first language learning, and that the process of learning a second language is also systematic.

Second language learning is now studied much the same way as first language learning. A second language learner is no longer looked upon as an utterer of language filled with mistakes but is considered as equally creative and intelligent as any first language learner. He is "proceeding through logical, systematic stages of acquisition, creatively acting upon his linguistic environment as he encounters the target language's form and function in meaningful contexts."

The errors a second language learner makes are no longer considered as persistence of old habits but are understood to be a result of testing new hypotheses about the target language. As hypotheses are tested, the learner
is moving towards a closer and closer approximation of the target language. Nemser refers to this as the learner's "approximative system."\(^{16}\)

The term "system" can also aptly describe the errors of language learners which are systematic; these should not be confused with mistakes. Mistakes are errors of performance which are at random and occur as a result of fatigue, stress, or temporary memory lapse. They are indications of failure to use a known system correctly. Errors are systematic and are errors of competence. They reflect a learner's competence at a particular stage of language learning.\(^{17}\)

The language of a learner at a particular stage of learning is termed the learner's "interlanguage" by Selinker who defines it as the learner's language system which is somewhere between the system of his first language and the target language.\(^{18}\) Corder names it the learner's "idiosyncratic dialect" by which "the rules required to account for it are particular to the individual."\(^{19}\)

Errors are significant in that they provide evidence for linguists to study the learner's interlanguage and the strategies he uses in learning a language.\(^{20}\) Errors are also indications to the teacher as to how far a student has progressed and what remains to be learned. They are indispensable to the learner himself since the making of
errors is regarded as a device a learner uses in order to test his hypotheses about the nature of the language being learned.

In summary, the literature suggests that the strong version of CA may not always be reliable as an a priori predictor of errors that occur in the target language. On the other hand, studies such as those by Wardhaugh and others indicate that a weaker version of CA that considers what learners actually do may be very profitable in understanding the process of second language learning.

Both versions of CA emphasize interference of the first language in acquiring the target language; but the research of Richards and Schacter, among others, point out that errors may result from causes other than interference such as overgeneralization and avoidance.

Some of the literature stresses that achieving fluency in a second language is a systematic process of learning in which errors are departures from the uses of the target language as opposed to mistakes which are due to failure to employ a known system.

With these considerations in mind, the present study will use errors to describe the Malay speaker's interlanguage with emphasis on verb tenses. Errors will be divided into errors in choice and errors in form. The present study will also examine some of the causes of these errors.
Studies of Verb Tense Problems

A major part of the problem in verb tenses for ESL learners is in the use of verb tenses. One problem in this area is failure to maintain tense continuity. Godfrey defines maintaining tense continuity as "once a tense is used representing a particular temporal reference central to the topic, the tense will continue until the topic with which it is associated is exhausted. When a new topic with a new temporal reference calls for a new tense, the former tense is terminated and a new one is initiated."\(^{21}\)

The second rule in maintaining tense continuity is one that concerns verbs in the generic present tense. Although these verbs interrupt the continuity of the tense, they do not disrupt the development of the topic since they supply background information to support the topic. Godfrey used tense continuity as a monitoring device in his study of speech production by Japanese and Spanish speakers.\(^{22}\) Tense continuity is also relevant to the present study where a failure to maintain tense continuity by subjects will be considered an error in choice.

The major finding in Godfrey's study of speech production is that an increase in the level of proficiency does not show any decrease in tense error rates.\(^{23}\) This conclusion is based on the subjects' error rates that were erratic and did not have any pattern of gradual decrease
when the error rates from the lower to the higher levels of proficiency were observed.

Godfrey also found that the subjects in Level One had unexpectedly low error rates and this indicates that the subjects were avoiding the more difficult tense forms. Disuse and avoidance were profitable strategies for the Level One subjects who employed them. Other subjects who attempted the more difficult tenses and tried to maintain the past tense continuities had higher error rates.

However, Godfrey cautions that avoidance should not be confused with the lack of awareness of tense markings. Other factors that could affect the error rates are the topics given to the subjects, attention limitations, types of topic continuity established, and how difficult a continuity is to maintain.

Another study was conducted by Chappell and Rodby on verb tense errors in ESL compositions. The subjects in the study were asked to explain their errors and their answers were taped for analysis. A third of the errors found in their writings were performance based where they knew the relevant rule and were able to correct the errors readily. About 40% of the errors were due to form where they knew what tense to use but were forming it incorrectly.

A quarter of the errors were due to choice and became the focus of the study's second area of inquiry which is the discourse context of verb errors. The researchers
hypothesized that there would be more errors in contexts that required shifts in verb tenses. The results of the study confirmed their hypothesis. Examples of contexts that require shifts in tense are the use of generic present tense in the past tense passages to supply background information and discourse that requires perfects or modals.

Writings by ESL learners illustrate a problem in continuity, so much so that when sentences from ESL writings are isolated, they may be grammatically correct, but when put together with the others they do not work at the discourse level. Part of the problem has been identified by Godfrey to be failure to maintain tense continuity, and part of the problem is due to the learner's lack of Booth's notion of "temporal stance." Temporal stance is the balance between the writer who remains at a fixed position and the shifting time frames of the actions or states under discussion. The balance determines the tense choice.

The other problem with ESL writers is that they are not in control at the time of writing. The rule or event is in control instead and ESL writers choose the tense on a clause by clause and sentence by sentence basis without any regard to consistency of temporal stance.

Observing this problem, Chappell and Rodby find that the ESL writers' problem is twofold. Firstly, they do not understand how context and temporal stance can influence tense use. They do not know the function of tenses in
in a discourse. As a result, they choose the tenses arbitrarily and often switch tenses at random.\textsuperscript{30}

The second part of the problem is that ESL writings are frequently marked with tense use that, although not incorrect, makes the writing difficult for the reader to read and understand. The researchers attribute this to the lack of time adverbials and not to tense shifts. When time adverbials are absent the writing becomes incohesive overall even when the tense is correct.\textsuperscript{31}

Related to the studies mentioned so far in this section is that of tense problems of Tagalog speakers.\textsuperscript{32} It was found in a study of writings by these speakers that tense sequence is in the highest rung of difficulty. This is traced to the structural differences between the Tagalog tense system and the English system.

Using the Bull Framework, events can be divided into three categories in relation to the Point Present (PP). Events can be occurring simultaneously with PP, occur before PP (past), and occur after the point PP (future). In the Tagalog time frame, events are divided into those that have begun and those that have not begun. There are no formal signs in Tagalog to indicate the past in contrast to the present but formal signs for events that have begun and those that have not begun are present in Tagalog. This difference in the two languages' tense-aspect systems is the cause of errors due to shifting tenses at random by
Tagalog speakers. The following examples are taken from the mentioned study to illustrate problems in tense sequence:

1. *I said I'll write that very day.
   (I said I'd write that very day.)

2. *We are now in Hamburg and would be leaving for Copenhagen tomorrow.
   (We are now . . . and will be leaving for Copenhagen tomorrow.)

3. *I want to get to know you people there . . . so that we could get acquainted with one another.
   (I want to get to know . . . so that we can get acquainted with one another.)

4. *If this stay has been all day and no night, it would have helped me much.
   (If this stay had been all day . . . it would have helped me much.)

5. *It was more or less inferred that I will yield my position to him.
   (It was more or less inferred that I would yield my position to him.)

Castelo's study illustrates the effect of interference in tense sequence by Tagalog speakers. In the present study, the possibility of interference as a possible explanation of verb tense errors by Malay speakers will be considered.
Transfer

The term transfer refers to the carryover of previous performance or knowledge in subsequent learning. When prior knowledge benefits subsequent learning, the transfer is positive. When prior learning interferes and causes errors, negative transfer or interference is said to have occurred. In most cases, studies on transfer in second language learning concentrate on interference.

In the Contrastive Analysis hypothesis, errors in second language learning are said to be caused by the interference of the first language. However, research has shown that it is not the only cause of errors in second language learning. Richards points out that there are other causes of errors like overgeneralization and ignorance of rule restrictions, among others. These errors are intralingual and developmental errors.

Richards' study and similar studies like his do not lessen the importance of studying transfer in second language learning. It has been found that transfer can affect language learning at the morphological, syntactical, and phonological levels.

A study by Taylor examines the use of transfer and overgeneralization as strategies by elementary and intermediate level ESL students. From this study, it is found that the use of transfer decreases with increased
proficiency and the use of overgeneralization increases with increased proficiency. The method used in the study was translation of Spanish sentences into English by Spanish speakers. The results of the study also show that proficiency levels do not seem to have an effect on the types of errors made. Both levels made the same categories of errors. The intermediate level students only made less errors in each category.

A response to Taylor's study is that by Sheen which questions the conclusion made by Taylor that the use of transfer as a strategy decreases with increased level of proficiency. Sheen conducted a study on the speech of near-bilinguals and found that 74% of total errors were caused by negative transfer. Out of the total errors in syntax, 79% were due to negative transfer.

Sheen's study illustrates that negative transfer is still dominant in the speech of high proficiency level learners. He stresses that the overriding effect of negative transfer should not be overlooked and that negative transfer is unsteady and can reverse depending on the content being learned and the age of the learner.

The present study is interested in examining whether transfer is one of the causes of verb tense errors of Malay speakers. If it is one of the causes, the study will want to find out if it affects verb tense formation or verb tense choice or both.
The two studies in this section are mentioned because they refer to a variety of English spoken in Singapore that is similar to that spoken in West Malaysia. This variety of English is called the "Singapore Basilect" by Richards. The basilect is the most distant from the Standard English. The acrolect is the most prestigious and formal variety of Singapore English, and the mesolect refers to the intermediate varieties.

The Singapore Basilect is a result of the blending of the language and culture of the ethnic groups living in Singapore. The languages of the Chinese, Malays, Indians, and other minority groups have influenced the characteristics of the basilect. The same ethnic groups make up West Malaysia and can influence the basilect in West Malaysia in much the same way. Richards defines basilects as "products of merging what needs to be said with linguistic codes for how things are said within limits of what can be easily learned and produced." The Singapore Basilect did not derive from a pidgin but it does share features with creoles. It involves simplifications at various levels. In Singapore, there are two classes of speakers. The first are those who have attended English-medium schools and they make up the
English speaking community with a basilect-mesolect-acrolect range. The second class of speakers are those who have attended Chinese-medium schools and do not use English as extensively. To them, English is more of a foreign language. The same can be said of the speakers in West Malaysia. The second class of speakers are those who have either attended Malay-medium or Chinese-medium schools.

Some of the characteristics of the basilect mentioned by Richards which are related to the present study are the modal system, lexicalization, and restructuring.¹⁴⁰

The modal system of the basilect is made up of the modals CAN, CANNOT, and MUST which are used in the present tense form. The modals are preserved for maximum semantic salience (can, cannot, must) and other modal categories are expressed through lexicalization.

1. Here can smoke. (You may smoke here.)
2. Maybe she working tonight. (She could be working tonight.)
3. Five o'clock I see you. (I will see you at five.)
4. Better you leave now. (You ought to leave now.)
5. Better you wear helmet. (You should wear a helmet.)

Restructuring is seen in the following example:

6. Why you don't help them. (You ought to have
helped them.)

7. Why you don't tell her you sorry. (I think you should have told her you were sorry.)

Lexicalization is seen in the following example where it is used to express past activity:

8. Last time I work in bank. (I used to work in a bank.)

Lexicalization is also used to create aspect in the basilect. The following are examples of aspect:

9. I work here six months already. (I have been working for six months.)

10. I left school already three months. (I left school three months ago.)

To express habitual aspect, either present or past, "use(d) to" is being used in the basilect:

11. All Europeans use to go there. (It is common for Europeans to go there.)

The second study is by Foley on the development of English in pre-school children in Singapore. Thirty cases were studied where tape recordings of the children were made. The study concentrated on lexico-grammatical items used by the children. The results include the data collected from the adults talking to the children. Only results relevant to the present study are discussed.

Dropping of copula "to be" is found in 90% of the
sentences produced by children and 60% in the sentences produced by adult speakers. An example of dropping the copula "to be" is:

12. She very naughty.

The third person singular present tense marking is absent in 87% of the children's speech and 63% of the adults' speech.

13. My mother scold me.
14. Who say no light?

Past tense markings are also absent in 87% of the children's speech and 60% of the adults' speech.

15. You never been there.
16. I promise her.

Features of the aspectual system from Chinese and Malay are found in 70% of the children's speech and 67% of the adults' speech.

17. But you eat your ice-cream already just now.
18. No more already.

The characteristics of the basilect and the children's language described here can be applied in the study of the speech in Malay speakers. Perhaps the question that can be asked here, in the present study, is whether any of the features of the children's language and the basilect can be found in the writings of Malay speakers.
CHAPTER III. MALAY LANGUAGE

This chapter describes the verb system, system of affixation, and sentence structure of the Malay language, the native language of the subjects in the present study.

Verb System

Verbs function in the predicate of sentences with the basic structure Subject-Predicate-(Object)-(Adverbial). The two main categories of verbs are kata kerja leksikal and kata kerja bantu.42

Kata kerja leksikal

Kata kerja leksikal or main verbs are subdivided into kata kerja perbuatan (action verbs) and kata kerja keadaan (stative verbs).

Main verbs can either be transitive or intransitive. Transitive verbs with one object are called kata kerja ekatransitif and those that take two objects are called kata kerja dwitransitif. Transitive verbs with one object can have either a noun phrase or a clause as the object.

1. Dia melukis gambar.
   she draw picture
   (She draws a picture.)
2. Saya fikir dia tidak akan datang.
   I think he not will come
   (I thought that he would not come.)

   Kata kerja dwitransitif, verbs which take two objects,
   can either take two phrases or one phrase and one clause
   as the objects.

3. Dia memberi saya bola itu.
   he gave me ball that
   (He gave me that ball.)

4. Dia memberitahu saya bahawa mereka akan datang.
   she told me that they will come
   (She told me that they are coming.)

   Transitive verbs can either be transitif jati (true
   transitives) or transitif semu (act like transitives). All
   kata kerja dwitransitif verbs are true transitives and kata
   kerja ekatransitif verbs are either transitif jati or
   transitif semu.

   Transitif jati are verbs that can be made passive by
   using the prefix di- and occur in sentences with the
   structure Object-Action-Performer. The passive form of
   the verb melukis in sentence (1) would be:

5. Gambar itu dilukisnya.
   picture that drawn her
   (That picture was drawn by her.)

   Transitif semu are verbs that do not have passive
   forms and cannot be made passive with the prefix di-.
6. Dia ada basikal.
   he has bicycle
   (He has a bicycle.)
7. *Basikal diada nya.
   (*A bicycle is had by him.)

Kata kerja perbuatan or action verbs can also be
categorized according to active and passive forms. Kata
kerja aktif can either be transitive or intransitive verbs
and are further divided into aktif jati and aktif semu.
Kata kerja aktif jati are verbs that can be made passive
with the prefix di- and usually occur with the prefix me-.
Kata kerja aktif semu do not have passive counterparts,
for example, the verb ada in sentence (6).

Kata kerja pasif are also divided into jati and semu
divisions. Kata kerja pasif jati are verbs which take the
prefix di- and appear in sentences with the structure Object-
Action-(By)-(Performer), for example,
8. Bakul itu dianyam oleh nya.
   basket that weave by her
   (That basket was woven by her.)

Kata kerja pasif semu do not take any prefix except
per- and appear in sentences with the structure Object-
Performer-Action, for example,
9. Lagu ini ingin saya tujukan kepada nya.
   song this want I dedicate to her
   (I dedicate this song to her.)
There should not be any element separating the performer from the kata kerja pasif semu. Modals and negative particles cannot be used.

**Kata kerja bantu**

These verbs "assist" the main verbs to express aspectual time and modality. The two main categories of these verbs are kata kerja aspek and kata kerja modalitas. Both precede the main verb and can stand as minimal sentences in direct speech, for example,

10. Boleh saya tolong? (Can I help?)
   
   Boleh. (Sure.)

**Kata kerja aspek** refer to actions or events which can be divided into actions that have occurred, are in progress, or have not begun yet.

**Sudah, telah, and pernah** refer to actions or events that have occurred in the past. **Sudah** refers to completed actions or events.

11. Saya sudah membaca rencana itu.
   
   I read article that
   
   (I have read that article.)

   Meaning: I have read that article in the past and have completed reading it.

**Telah** is used only in the written form and refers to actions that can still be in progress or completed. It refers to a specific time in the past. **Sudah** does not
refer to any specific time in the past, and when it replaces telah the resulting sentence will be awkward.

12. Saya telah melihat dia dipasar hari ini.
I see her at market today
(I saw her at the market today.)

Similarly, replacing sudah with telah will produce awkward, for example,

Aunt left
(Aunt has left.)


However, if the sentence is expanded with an adverbial phrase (in this case) the sentence is acceptable:

Aunt left morning just now
(Aunt left this morning.)

Pernah refers to completed actions or events in the past during a specified time. When a negative particle is used with it, the time referred to is past time to the present time.

Grandmother is healthy. She has never been ill.)
18. Dia bercerita tentang keindahan Tanjung Rhu. He talked about beauty (place). 
Dia pernah bercuti disana. He holiday there. 
(He talked about the beauty of Tanjung Rhu. He has been there on a holiday before.)

*Sedang, masih, and tengah* refer to actions or events that are in progress. *Sedang* refers to incomplete, ongoing actions. *Tengah* is used in place of *sedang* in conversational Malay.

Don't noisy baby sleep. 
(Don't be noisy. The baby is sleeping.)

20. Dia tengah mandi apabila talipon berbunyi. 
He bathe when telephone rang. 
(He was bathing when the telephone rang.)

*Masih* also refers to actions or events in progress but also signifies a transition between two actions or conditions.

All people sleep he watch television. 
(Everyone's asleep but he is still watching the T.V.)

*Belum* and *akan* refer to actions or events that have not
begun. **Belum** has a negative value in it, for example,

22. Dia belum pulang dari makmal.

he return from lab

(He has not returned from the lab.)

**Akan** expresses desire to do something and also intention, for example,

23. Kami akan pulang ke tanah air tahun hadapan.

we return to homeland year next

(We are returning to our country next year.)

**Kata kerja modalitas**

These verbs "assist" in giving "atmosphere" to actions or situations referred to by the main verbs. The following table illustrates the types of modals in Malay and what they indicate:

**Table 1. Modals in the Malay language**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modal</th>
<th>To indicate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mahu, hendak</td>
<td>desire, intention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boleh, dapat</td>
<td>capability, permission granted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesti, wajib, harus</td>
<td>obligation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mungkin</td>
<td>possibility, probability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enggan</td>
<td>refusal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perlu</td>
<td>necessity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Combination of kata kerja bantu

The following combinations are possible for modals and aspectual verbs in Malay:

(i) Aspectual + Aspectual
(ii) Modal + Modal
(iii) Aspectual + Modal'

Combinations of type (i) have pernah as the second element to produce the following:

24. Dia belum pernah kesini lagi.
   she here yet
   (She has never been here before.)

25. Dia sudah pernah kesana.
   she there
   (She has been there before.)

26. Saya telah pernah berjumpa dengan nya dahulu.
   I met with her before
   (I have met her before.)

The possible combinations of type (ii) are of modals which indicate capability and obligation.

27. Kita mesti boleh habiskan kerja ini hari
   we finish work this today
   ini juga.
   also
   (We should be able to finish this work today.)

28. Kita harus boleh mendaki gunung
   we climb mountain
as high as this

(We should be able to climb a mountain this high.)

Combinations of type (iii) are the most common. The following combinations of this type are possible:

(a) **Sudah** and **belum** are two aspectual verbs with opposite meanings. Each of the possible combination with **belum** has its opposite meaning when combined with **sudah**.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{[sudah]} & \quad + \\
\text{[belum]} & \quad + \\
\text{mahi} & \quad \text{hendak} \\
\text{mesti} & \quad \text{harus} \\
\text{harus} & \quad \text{wajib} \\
\text{wajib} & \quad \text{boleh} \\
\text{boleh} & \quad \text{dapat} \\
\text{dapat} & \quad \text{perlu}
\end{align*}
\]

(b) **Masih** can combine with modals denoting desire, capability, and permission granted.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{[masih]} & \quad + \\
\text{[hendak]} & \quad \text{mahi} \\
\text{[mahi]} & \quad \text{dapat} \\
\text{[dapat]} & \quad \text{boleh}
\end{align*}
\]

(c) **Sedang** can combine with modals denoting desire. However, the use of these combinations is infrequent.
(d) Akan can combine with modals denoting capability and permission granted.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{[sedang]} & \quad + \quad \text{[mahu]} \\
\text{[akan]} & \quad + \quad \text{[boleh]} \\
\text{[akan]} & \quad + \quad \text{[dapat]}
\end{align*}
\]

Below are some sentences using the combinations:

29. Dia belum perlu membayar yuran lagi.
   he pay fee yet.
   (He is not required to pay his fees yet.)

30. Saya sudah mahu menalipon nya apabila
    I telephone her when
    dia tiba.
    she arrive
    (I was about to call her when she arrived.)

31. Dia masih hendak belajar.
    he learn.
    (He still wants to continue his studies.)

32. Tahun hadapan, kita akan boleh bercuti
    year next we be on holiday
    di kampung.
    at hometown
    (We will be able to visit our hometown
    next year.)
Affixes are used freely in the Malay language, both in the spoken and written forms of the language. A more frequent use of the affixation system occurs in the written form. Affixes can change the class, form, and function of words. As an example, when the suffix \textit{-an} is added to the word \textit{makan} (to eat), the word \textit{makanan} is no longer a verb (to eat) but has become a noun (food).

This system of affixation is used with verbs, nouns, adverbs, adjectives, numerals, and pronouns to produce more lexical items. In Malay prefixes, infixes, and suffixes are used. Infixes are the least used, and Malay has a limited vocabulary of words with infixes. Prefixes and suffixes can be used alone (\textit{menyany}i - singing), together (\textit{penerbangan} - flight), or in combination (\textit{memperbaiki} - repair).

The affixes are attached to the base of a word which can take any of the following forms:

(i) root, for example, \textit{rokok} (cigarette) becomes \underline{merokok} (to smoke)

(ii) root and affix, for example, \underline{setimbang} (in balance) becomes \underline{kesetimbangan} (equilibrium)

(iii) reduplicated root, for example, \underline{hari-hari} (everyday) becomes \underline{sehari-harian} (all day long)
(iv) compounded root, for example, matahari
("eye" and "day" are combined to form
the word "sun") becomes bermatahari
(to be in the sun)

When affixes are attached to verbs in the root form,
nouns, and adjectives, complex verbs are formed. The
affixes that can form complex verbs are:

(i) me(n)-  (vii) se-
(ii) ber-   (viii) mer-
(iii) ter-  (ix) -kan
(iv) di-    (x) -i
(v) per-    (xi) ke-an
(vi) -em-   (xii) ber-an

Affixation can give verbs different shades of meaning.
The following illustrates some of the different meanings
affixes can convey:

1. "becoming like" as in membatu which means
   "to become like a stone" as in when one
   keeps still in a state of shock
2. "to be in possession of" as in berwang which
   means "to have money" and implies that one
   is rich
3. "an accidental action" as in terbuang which
   means "accidentally thrown away"
Sentence Structure

The basic sentence structure in Malay is:

Subject-Predicate-Object-Adverbial

Malay sentences can be analyzed according to the different meanings of each component. The sentence structure from this type of analysis is:

Performer-Action-Completer

(Subject) (Pred) (Object)

Contrast the two sentences below:

1. Mereka merobohkan bangunan buruk itu.
   
   they demolished building old that
   
   (They demolished that old building.)

2. Kapal itu sudah berkarat.
   
   ship that rusty
   
   (That ship is rusty.)

The basic difference between the two sentences is that the subject in sentence (2) is not the performer of the action because the predicate is not filled with an action verb.

Sentences in Malay can also be of the Topic-Comment structure. The topic can be filled by the predicate, object, or adverbial. If the topic is filled by object, the resulting sentence is in the passive form.

3. Baju itu dijahitnya.
   
   dress that sew her
   
   (That dress was sewn by her.)
4. Kek itu dia masak.
   cake that she cook
   (That cake was baked by her.)

In the above example, the passive formed is without
the prefix di- and sentences like the above are called
Ayat pasif semu. Literally, the above sentence can be
translated as:

5. Kek itu dia masak.
   (That cake, she baked.)

An example of ayat pasif jati using the prefix di-
would be:

   cake that cook by her
   (That cake was baked by her.)

The topic of sentences with the Topic-Comment structure
can also be filled by the predicate:

7. Sudah siap kerja awak?
   already complete work your
   (Is your work completed?)

8. Minumlah kopi ini.
   drink coffee this
   (Please drink this cup of coffee.)

An example of the topic filled by the adverbial is:

9. Cepat-cepat dia mengemas bilik nya yang semak.
   quickly he tidy room his that messy
   (Quickly, he tidied his messy room.)
Statement of the Problem

The fact that a study is conducted to investigate and search for answers to certain observed phenomena, the researcher, in many cases, has more questions to be answered than hypotheses to be tested. That is the case in the present study.

The main questions in the present study are:

1. What types of verb tense errors can be found in the writings of Malay speakers?
2. What is the possible explanation for these errors?

The present study was initiated as a result of an informal, impromptu survey made by the author when in search of a feasible idea for a master's thesis project. The survey was conducted on those who have had experience teaching English to Malaysian students and on Malaysian students. The result of the survey was that Malaysian students have the most problems in verb tenses.

When asked, Malaysian students felt that they have problems in forming tenses correctly, choosing the proper tense to use, and knowing when to use a certain tense as apposed to another. Therefore, in this study, the objective is to find out the types of problems in verb tenses that they actually have instead of what they think they have.
Some of the other questions that were asked in this study are:

1. What types of errors in choice and errors in form are found?
2. Are there more errors in form or choice?
3. Are there any patterns that can be seen in the errors the subjects make either in form or choice?
4. Can Contrastive Analysis help explain some of the errors?
5. Is avoidance the cause of their having fewer errors in the more difficult tenses?
6. Do subjects avoid these tenses for any other reasons besides the fact that they are harder to form?

The present study aims in finding answers to these questions but as long as some of them are answered, the other remaining questions can be used for further analysis.

One hypothesis that was tested in this study is that there will be the greatest number of errors in form in Subject-Verb agreement because in Malay there is no subject-verb agreement. Interference will be seen to be the cause of these errors.
CHAPTER IV. METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the subjects, the materials, the data elicitation procedures, and data analysis.

Subjects

The subjects in this study are adult Malay speakers from West Malaysia. At the time of writing the compositions used as data in this study, they were enrolled in the undergraduate program at Iowa State University. They each have studied English for at least eleven years (six at the primary school level and five at the secondary school level) in Malaysia. Each has scored a minimum of 500 on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) before being admitted to the university. They are considered to be capable of competing academically with the native speakers of English.

They are divided into two groups. Group I is composed of 23 subjects. The compositions from this group were collected by Dr. Barbara Schwarte.

Group II was composed of seven subjects at first when the data were collected from the placement test they took in August 1984. Two of them passed the test and left the group. The remaining five were placed in English 100C
(composition) classes at Iowa State University. Data were collected from them again in December 1984.

The ratio of male to female subjects is 25:5 where four out of five female subjects are in Group II. This imbalance should not affect either the tense or topic choice since each group at each writing time wrote on the same topic, and tense choice is more dependent on the topic rather than on the subject's sex.

**Materials and Methods of Data Elicitation**

The subjects in Group I were asked to write two compositions on the same day. Four of the 23 subjects wrote only the first composition to give a total of 42 compositions from this group.

The time allotted for each composition was 30 minutes. A rest period of 30 minutes was given after the first composition. The subjects wrote on the same topic each time. However, they were not told beforehand that they would be writing on the same topic each time. The topic given was "The problems faced by my country today."

The subjects in Group II had two writing tasks. The first was the placement test for English taken in August 1984. The topic was "Describe the most exciting or dangerous
experience you have ever had." The second writing task was the final exam in the English 100C classes taken by the five who did not pass the placement test. The topic was "Describe the most interesting concept that you have learned in ISU." The time allotted for each task was 50 minutes. A total of 12 compositions was collected from this group.

A total of 54 compositions was collected from 30 subjects in both groups. Consent was given by the subjects for the use of their compositions in the present study.

Data Analysis

Each composition was read and analyzed by both the major professor, Dr. Aubrey Galyon, and the author. Each verb that is used was tabulated on individual coding sheets of each subject. The form of verb used, the choice of tense, and the use of the verb either in the main or subordinate clause were entered.

Errors are categorized into errors in choice and errors in form. Error in choice is error in the choice of tense considered appropriate for the narration of the composition. The sentence below is an example of error in choice:

The truth value of sentences was also checked, where possible, as in the sentence below:

2. *Malaysia was located in South East Asia.
An error as in the sentence above will be counted as an error in choice.

Where there is a failure to maintain tense continuity, the error will be considered as an error in choice.

Error in form is error in subject-verb agreement, formation of tense or aspect, omission, or insertion.
An example of error in subject-verb agreement is:

3. *I do not know what will happen to me if the winter sesson [sic] come soon.
An example of error in tense form is:

4. *I have also see the film "Jaws" which frightened me until now.

Error in omission is when a verb required is not used, for example,

5. *Another group from northern part.
An example of error in insertion is:

6. *However, they are occurred because of wrong channel of development.

For errors in choice, the wrong choice was entered, together with the tense that should have been used. Where an entry is entered as correct, it indicates that both the choice and form of tense are correct.
British English is not considered erroneous for the word "government" when both forms "government is" and "government are" in the subject-verb agreement are used. This exception applies only to the compositions collected from Group I where frequent reference was made to the word.
CHAPTER V. RESULTS

The study described here examined the verb tense problems found in the writings of Malay speakers who can be considered ESL students with intermediate to upper levels of proficiency. It was particularly interested in finding the exact types of errors in verb tense exhibited by their writings. The questions and findings that emerged from this study are:

1) What types of verb tense errors can be found in the writings of Malay speakers?

The types of errors committed by the Malay speakers in this study can be divided into errors in choice and errors in form. Errors in choice are errors resulting from not choosing the tense appropriate for narration in their composition, failure to maintain tense continuity, and choosing the wrong tense when narrating a fact that should be referred to in the generic present tense, for example.

Errors in form are errors made in the subject-verb agreement, forms of tenses and aspects, omission of required verbs, and insertion of verbs not required in sentences.

2) What is the proportion of errors to total correct?

A total of 1,952 verbs was examined in all. From
this total, the total correct is 1,660 and the total of errors is 292. About 15% of the total verbs examined are errors in verb tenses. The totals presented here are composite of the figures from Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4 which show totals for verbs and modals.

Table 2. Total Correct and Total Errors for Auxiliaries, Modals, and Infinitives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aux/Modals/Infi</th>
<th>Total Correct</th>
<th>Total Errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BE (Present)</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE (Past)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modals (Present)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modals (Past)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infinitives</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>769</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Total Correct and Total Errors for Participles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participles</th>
<th>Total Correct</th>
<th>Total Errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Total Correct and Total Errors for Tense and Aspect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense/Aspect</th>
<th>Total Correct</th>
<th>Total Errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple Present</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Past</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Perfect</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Perfect</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Progressive</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Progressive</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pres. Perfect Progressive</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive Forms:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Perfect</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Perfect</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Progressive</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal (Present)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal (Past)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>715</strong></td>
<td><strong>178</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3) By looking at the total of errors in general, are there more errors in form or in choice?

Out of 292 errors, 155 are errors in choice and 137 are errors in form. Errors in choice make up about 53% of the total errors. In general, there are more errors in choice than errors in form.

There are also more errors in choice for tense and aspect. Errors for auxiliaries, modals, and infinitives are given in Table 5. Table 6 shows that 62% of total errors in tense and aspect are errors in choice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aux/Modals/Infinitives</th>
<th>Total Errors</th>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BE (Present)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE (Past)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modals (Present)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modals (Past)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infinitives</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>94</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>67</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 5, there are more errors in choice than form for modals (both in the present and past tense forms) and infinitives. However, for the auxiliary BE there are
Table 5. Types of Errors for Tense and Aspect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense/Aspect</th>
<th>Total Errors</th>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple Present</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Past</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Perfect</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Perfect</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Progressive</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Progressive</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Perfect Progressive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive Forms:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Perfect</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Perfect</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Progressive</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal (Present)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal (Past)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>178</strong></td>
<td><strong>110</strong></td>
<td><strong>68</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
more errors in choice for the past tense form of the auxiliary but more errors in form for auxiliary BE in the present tense. In fact, 90% of the errors for the auxiliary BE are errors in form.

The types of errors for present participle are shown in Table 7. The breakdown of errors is shown only for the present participle since there are no errors for past participle.

Table 7. Types of Errors for Present Participles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participle</th>
<th>Total Errors</th>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The general pattern where there are more errors in choice is also seen for the errors in present participles. In general, it can be concluded that there are more errors in choice than in form with the exception of the auxiliary BE in the present tense form.

4) What are the types of errors in choice? Is there a pattern in the types of errors in choice?

The types of errors in choice are shown in Table 8. The greatest number of errors in choice is in the simple present tense followed by the simple past tense. One
Table 8. Errors in Choice for Tense and Aspect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense/Aspect</th>
<th>Total Errors</th>
<th>S. Present</th>
<th>S. Past</th>
<th>Perfect</th>
<th>Prog</th>
<th>Passive Forms</th>
<th>Perf</th>
<th>Prog</th>
<th>Parti</th>
<th>BE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Present</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Past</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Perfect</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Perfect</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pres. Progressive</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Progressive</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive Forms: Present</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pres. Progressive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*aIn this table, A refers to present tense form and B refers to past tense form.*
pattern in the errors in choice is that the greatest number of errors in the simple present is due to choosing the simple past and that for the simple past is for choosing the simple present. This switching of tenses accounts for 68% of total errors in choice for the simple present and 85% for the simple past.

From the same table, it can also be deduced that the greatest number of errors in choice occur in sentences in the active form. Out of the total of 110 errors in choice, only 18 errors are in the passive form. This can also be attributed to the fact that less use of sentences in the passive form is made, both in the spoken and written form of the language. With reference to this particular group, only 16% of the verbs used were in the passive form.

For the BE auxiliary, errors in choice are also due to the switching of the present tense form for the past tense form, and vice versa. Four out of the five errors in choice of BE auxiliary in the present tense form are due to choosing the past tense form instead. For the BE auxiliary in the past tense form, 14 out of 15 errors are due to incorrectly choosing the present tense form.

Similarly, the errors in choice for modals are due to tense switching. The total number of errors for modals is not as great but the pattern can still be seen.

Errors in choice for infinitives are due to choosing
participles instead. The results discussed here are
given in Table 9.

Table 9. Errors in Choice for Auxiliaries, Modals, and
Infinitives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aux/Modals^a</th>
<th>Total Errors</th>
<th>BE A</th>
<th>BE B</th>
<th>Modal A</th>
<th>Modal B</th>
<th>Infi A</th>
<th>Infi B</th>
<th>Parti A</th>
<th>Parti B</th>
<th>HAVE A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BE (Present)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE (Past)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modals (Pres)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modals (Past)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infinitives</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^aIn this table, Infi refers to infinitives, Parti refers to participles, A refers to present tense form, and B refers to past tense form.

Errors in choice make up about 90% of errors for
the present participle form. About half of the errors
are due to choosing the infinitive form, and the pattern
of switching the infinitive for the participle form and
vice versa can be seen in Table 9 and Table 10.

The next error in choice for the present participle
is in choosing the simple present tense form. However, errors in the present participle are very small in number; only 20 out of 196 participle forms. The types of errors in choice for the present participle are given in Table 10.

Table 10. Errors in Choice for Present Participles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participle</th>
<th>Total Errors</th>
<th>Simple Pres</th>
<th>Simple Past</th>
<th>Infi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5) What are the types of errors in form? Is subject-verb agreement the main cause of errors in form for the Malay speakers?

Table 11 gives the types of errors in form for tense and aspect. The greatest number of errors is in the simple present with concentration in the subject-verb agreement. Subject-verb agreement errors make up about 90% of the total errors in form for the simple present tense.

Subject-verb agreement errors are also found in the present perfect passive form. About 63% of the total errors in form for tense and aspect are due to the lack of subject-verb agreement. The results also indicate that in the passive forms, the errors are due to not using the past participle form. For the future tense, the errors
Table 11. Errors in Form for Tense and Aspect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense/Aspect</th>
<th>Total Errors</th>
<th>Sub-Verb Omiss</th>
<th>Inser</th>
<th>Infii Req</th>
<th>Noun Req</th>
<th>Parti Req</th>
<th>HAVE Req</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Present</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>30(S)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11(P)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Past</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Perfect</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Perfect</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Perfect</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Perfect</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pres. Progressive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal (present)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal (Past)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*aIn this table, Omiss refers to omission, Inser refers to insertion, Infi Req refers to infinitive required, Parti Req refers to participle required.*
are due to not using the infinitive form after the modal WILL.

Errors in form for the auxiliary BE in both the present and past tense forms are also most common in subject-verb agreement. The results are given in the table below:

Table 12. Errors in Form for Auxiliaries, Modals, and Infinitives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aux/Modals</th>
<th>Total Errors</th>
<th>Sub-Verb Omission Agree</th>
<th>Insert &quot;TO&quot; Req</th>
<th>Infinitives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BE (Present)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>14(S)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13(P)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE (Past)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1(S)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1(P)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modals (Pres)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modals (Past)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infinitives</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Omission is another cause of errors in form where a verb or modal required is not used. The greatest number in omission is for the present tense form of the auxiliary BE. For the same type of auxiliary, insertion of the auxiliary when it is not required is the other cause of errors in
For participles, the two causes of errors are also insertion and omission. However, errors in form and errors in participles, in general, can be said to be almost negligible. The results are given in Table 13.

Table 13. Errors in Form for Present Participle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participle</th>
<th>Total Errors</th>
<th>Insertion</th>
<th>Omission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the given results for errors in form, the hypothesis is confirmed that the greatest number of errors in form are caused by the lack of subject-verb agreement. In this study, subject-verb agreement errors account for 56% of total errors in form.

6) In both types of errors, are there more errors in the main or subordinate clauses?

In both types of errors, there are more errors in the main clauses than the subordinate clauses. This is due to the fact that the subjects used more main clauses than subordinate clauses in their writings. The breakdown of errors found in the main and subordinate clauses are given in Tables 14, 15, and 16.
Table 14. Errors in Main and Subordinate Clauses for Tense and Aspect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense/Aspect</th>
<th>Errors in Choice</th>
<th>Errors in Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Main</td>
<td>Sub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Present</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Past</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Perfect</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Perfect</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Progressive</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Progressive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pres. Perfect Progressive</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive Forms:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Perfect</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Perfect</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Progressive</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal (Present)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal (Past)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>66</strong></td>
<td><strong>44</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 15. Errors in Main and Subordinate Clauses for Auxiliaries, Modals, and Infinitives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aux/Modals/Infi</th>
<th>Errors in Choice</th>
<th>Errors in Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Main</td>
<td>Sub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE (Present)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE (Past)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modals (Present)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modals (Past)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infinitives</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16. Errors in Main and Subordinate Clauses for Present Participles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participle</th>
<th>Errors in Choice</th>
<th>Errors in Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Main</td>
<td>Sub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7) Are there any other findings in the study?

The following are some findings that can be studied in the future, either on the same group of subjects or otherwise:

1. It is found that the subjects' problems with modals center around the modals WILL and CAN. Errors in choice are caused by the modal CAN where the pattern of
tense switching is also seen. The subjects used the modal CAN in the present tense when they should have used the past tense, and vice versa. Although the total of errors found in this study is small for modals, a study in the future which concentrates on modals can find out why the problems with modals center around CAN and WILL for this particular group of subjects. The main type of error for WILL is in form and is due to omission.

2. The second finding is the use of nouns versus verb forms. Some subjects used the inflected form for nouns, for example:

a) "misuse" as in "misused of drugs" versus "the drug was misused"

b) "imbalance" as in "imbalanced in the economic structure" versus "the economic situation was imbalanced by . . . ."

Other almost similar structures are:

c) *who are still unemploy

d) *hostel life was so excited
CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the verb tense problems of a homogeneous group of subjects who have relatively high proficiency levels. The subjects were adult native speakers of Malay who have studied English as their second language and have reached the peak of their interlanguage systems.

The findings and observations from this study are summarized below:

1. Verb tense problems of Malay speakers can be categorized into errors in choice and errors in form. It is found that these subjects made more errors in choice than in form, and that errors in choice constitute 53% of total errors in verb tense.

2. The hypothesis that there will be more errors in subject-verb agreement than any other errors in form was confirmed. Subject-verb agreement errors accounted for 56% of total errors in form.

3. The hypothesis was based on Contrastive Analysis of the two contact languages' verb and tense systems. In Malay there is no copula BE and subject-verb agreement is not required. From this confirmation of the hypothesis, it can be concluded that the Contrastive Analysis a priori prediction method is useful in the study of second language learning; at least it has been so in this particular study.
4) The two most used tenses found in the writings of Malay speakers are the simple present tense and the simple past tense. Related to this is the fact that they make the greatest number of errors in these two tenses. Some have attempted to use the more "difficult" tense forms such as the present perfect passive form.

5) The fact that there are fewer errors in the more "difficult" tense forms do not necessarily mean that the subjects do not have problems in these tenses. They have fewer errors because they did not use these tenses as often as they did the other "simpler" tenses. The avoidance strategy comes into play here.

However, other factors may also affect tense choice. The topic of the compositions that they wrote determined a large part of tense choice. The topics that were given to them called for the narrative descriptions of past experiences, and such topics call for the simple past tense and the generic present tense. This accounts for the reason the subjects used these two tenses the most.

Interference is another problem for this particular group of subjects. In Malay, it can be said that the three forms of aspect are the present, progressive, and past. It does not have a "variety" of tense and aspect as in the English language. Even then, the use of aspectual verbs that indicate the aspect referred to by the speaker of Malay is sometimes omitted. In the written form of Malay, these
verbs are used to produce grammatical sentences. In some cases, however, depending on the context and the use of time adverbials, they may be omitted.


(Last night, I went to a party and met a girl who gave me a present.)

In the second sentence above, telah may be omitted since it is understood that the present was given by the girl at the party.

The subjects used the past and present tenses the most because these two "tenses" exist in the Malay language. The other types of tense and aspects are not used because they are not as familiar as the present and past tense forms. This can also be the cause for the subjects' problems in choosing the correct tense and resulted in "switching" of tenses. Firstly, they do not have similar tense types in their native language and do not have any background to refer to, and secondly, the tense types are not clearly defined in Malay, especially in the spoken form of the language. The second sentence in the example, in other contexts, can either mean "she gives me the present", 
"she is giving me the present," or "she gave me the present."

Another reason why the more "complex" tense forms are not used by the subjects is that these forms are not as commonly used as the present and past tense forms. How often does one use present progressive passive form in conversations? It is always the case that the tenses that are most frequently used and heard in conversations will also be used in writing.

The teaching implication here is that the more complex tense forms should be introduced to students but only with the aim to let them know that these forms exist and that certain usage of the tenses can impart different meanings. As they progress, the more difficult forms may be used in exercises but the different meanings they can impart should be emphasized. Problems with verb tenses are basically due to choice and not in form.

The simpler tense forms like the present, past, and future should be concentrated on, for in the teaching of a language, the main objective is to teach the language that is used by native speakers and not the language from English grammar textbooks.

6) The fact that these subjects made the greatest number of errors in choice indicate that they have problems in not knowing how tense functions in discourse. More emphasis should be placed on teaching how tense functions
in discourse. Instead of using single sentences in teaching tenses to students who have basic knowledge of the formation of tense and aspect, a better approach would be to use paragraph-length excerpts where students will be able to see how tense functions in discourse. With single sentence exercises, students can "predict" what form should be used after a few exercises and they do not learn how to use tenses in discourse.

Another teaching suggestion is to use the students' own writing as remedial exercises and to explain how tense functions in discourse. Feedback from the student on why a particular tense was chosen will help the teacher understand the student's reasoning behind the choice made.

6) Another related problem in tense choice is that some students choose tenses arbitrarily because they do not "understand" when to use a particular tense. One method that can be used to help them is using time adverbials as indication of particular tenses. For example, "yesterday" and "before" can be used to show them the difference between the simple past and present perfect:

   a) I went there yesterday.
   b) I have been there before.

7) Translation can also be used by the teacher who knows the students' native language to explain certain concepts that may be similar to that found in the target language. However, this method should only be used as the
last resort when everything else fails. The teacher should not make it a habit of translating every sentence into Malay, for example, since this will tend to make students opt for an easier alternative when learning the more difficult tense forms.

It has been the objective of this study to investigate the types of errors in verb tense found in the writings of Malay speakers. It is the author's hope that the results will serve at least these two purposes. The first is to provide teachers with the types of verb tense problems faced by this particular group of ESL students, and that the results of the study can be used for planning the lessons on tense and aspect of the English language. The results indicate that subject-verb agreement and tense choice are the two main problems faced by these students.

The second purpose is that the results of this study will instigate further research on the problems in learning English faced by this group of ESL learners. English in Malaysia is as important as the national language, Bahasa Malaysia, in its role as a medium in vocational, educational, and social communicative purposes. Studies on learning and teaching problems are inadequate with reference to this particular group of ESL learners. Further research in these areas is needed and cannot be more emphasized.
NOTES


3. Godfrey, p. 94.


7. Whitman and Jackson, p. 60.


14 Brown, p. 166.
15 Brown, pp. 162-163.
18 See Larry Selinker, "Interlanguage," IRAL, 10, No. 3 (1972), 209-231.
21 Godfrey, p. 94.
22 See Godfrey, pp. 95, 97-101.
23 Godfrey, p. 97.
27 Chappell and Rodby, pp. 310-311.
28 Wayne C. Booth as cited in Chappell and Rodby, p. 311.
29 Chappell and Rodby, p. 313.
30 Chappell and Rodby, p. 309.
31 Chappell and Rodby, p. 316.
33 Brown, pp. 84-85.


37 Sheen, p. 108.


40 Richards, "Form and Function," pp. 156-160. The examples used in the text are taken from this article.


42 All the terms in Malay used in the text are taken from Prof. Dr. Asmah Hj. Omar, *Nahu Melayu Mutakhir* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1982).
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