

A Case Study on the Interference of Bahasa Melayu (L1) on the Tenses Used in Writing English (L2) Essays among Form Two Secondary Students

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Abstract: Writing in English language is one of the most challenging skills faced by English language learners in Malaysia especially if they do not have a good proficiency in the language. This study is to identify tenses transferred negatively and positively from L1 (Bahasa Melayu) to English (L2) essays among Form Two secondary students in one of the national schools in Ipoh, Perak. The design of this study is a qualitative which is appropriate to identify the phenomena. Two types of methods were used to collect data. The data collection instruments were document analysis and interview. To execute the study 24 writing samples were chosen from low proficiency level of students. They were instructed to write about 100 word essays on a given topic in English. The tenses were later corroborated and compared to substantiate the theoretical arguments in the field of language transfer. From the findings, it was found that mother tongue highly interferes in students' writing in simple present tense, simple past tense and future simple tense. In addition, it was found that the sample employed a translation method although they understand the importance of English language.

Keywords: interference; second language acquisition; tenses; transfer

I. INTRODUCTION

English language competence among Malaysian learners has declined due to the change in the medium of instruction from English to Bahasa Melayu (Malay language) (Darmi and Albion, 2013). Bahasa Melayu interference is one of the major sources in committing syntactic errors. The learners have directly translated the Malay words into English words which led to malformation of the sentences (Gedion, Tati and Peter, 2016). Mother tongue interference negatively which greatly impacts the acquisition of English language skills among secondary school learners (Muriungi & Mbui, 2013). According to Onwubiko (2012) the matter of concern now is how to raise the level of proficiency of the English language in Malaysia to a level as high if not greater than during the days of the English medium. Improving proficiency in English language only through English subjects in the school curriculum is insufficient as curriculum planners at the Education Ministry and teachers in schools have realised this crucial matter over the years. A majority of students use Bahasa Melayu as a main medium in education in national schools. National school subjects, with the exception

of the English language subject are taught in Bahasa Melayu (Onwubiko, 2012).

Students' essays are badly influenced by their L1 (Bahasa Melayu) in L2 (English) tenses writing. The students use verbs without a correct tense due to transfer of L1 (Bahasa Melayu) as Bahasa Melayu has no tenses. Lau Su Kia, Xiongyong Cheng, Tan Kooi Yee, and Choo Wee Ling (2011) study has confirmed that a depressing but common phenomenon, colloquially known as 'rojak language' frequently arises in Malaysia's multilingual society, wherein code-switching creates mixed languages. It has previously been realised that the phenomenon of code-switching not only materialises in discussions among language users in Malaysia but also takes place in sentences used in the entertainment news of Malaysian Chinese dailies. It has been discovered that Malaysians who have a good knowledge of English frequently code-switch English into Malay, Chinese or Tamil. Musa, Koo and Azman (2012) also mentioned that there is a strong influence of the Bahasa Melayu over the learning of English among Malaysian learners.

Muriungi & Mbui (2013) confirmed that their findings from English secondary school teachers have proved to the fact that their students lack communicative command. Secondary school students' are bereft of proper enthusiasm to be able to learn English. Teachers mostly pay attention to those high achieving students. Since the maintenance of mother tongue hinders the advancement of English language among the secondary school students, administration should enforce rules to ascertain that mother-tongue is not used in schools. Schools ought to furnish essential resources and facilities such libraries in order to provide an enabling environment for the acquisition of English in day schools. Schools should also ensure that all learners are inspired and numerous ways of motivation should be implemented (Muriungi & Mbui, 2013).

Transfer from L1 to L2 was considered a form of interference of L1 habits on L2 learning (Erarslan & Hol, 2014). Many behaviorists argue that L1 interference is a major problem for L2 learners. This situation is dominant in L2 learner's productive and receptive skills which are greatly influenced not merely by L1 patterns but also includes the factor of how great the similarities or differences between L1 and L2 languages are (Erarslan & Ho, 2014). In fact Karim & Nassaji

(2013) study also mentioned that many researchers studied the writing strategies of L1 and L2 and found there are similarities between the two languages.

Consequently L2 writers make use of their L1 transfer and learning strategies when writing in L2. Therefore errors take place when learners inappropriately transfer some features of L1 in their L2 writing (El-dali, 2012). Learners who have good mastery of L2 are able to apply good transfer strategies in L1 (Abeywickrama, 2011). However, if the command of the language is inadequate, they are unable to use L1 in L2 writing effectively. This is an unconscious process and results in negative transfer (Gvarishvili, 2013). This is one issue that the researcher would like to investigate in this present study.

The study addresses the following research question:

Which L1 (Bahasa Melayu) tenses have been transferred to L2 (English)?

Objectives of this study is to identify L2 (English) tenses transferred negatively and positively from L1 (Bahasa Melayu) in writing English (L2) essays among Form Two secondary.

In terms of second language acquisition (SLA), students are faced with the same logical problems in the process of learning the first language. Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is study of how students acquire a second language (L2) additionally to their first language (L1). Second Language Acquisition is a process of learning any other language after the first language whether it is a second, third or fourth language. Therefore, any language other than the first language is called a second language (SL) or it is also referred as a target language (TL). People's linguistic ability is combined with thinking ability, as it develops as thinking develops. According to Hao Yu and Chi Ren (2013), L1 is the first language reaction system formed in the condition that no other language system was set up in the people's thinking system before. Any person who begins learning a new knowledge or skills has the tendency to make use of their original cognitive structure, including the L1 knowledge and abstract thinking ability learned through the L1, which constitute the original cognitive structure of SLA; this is the foundation of information processing. This is the main concern especially when the researcher assessed written text scripts from Form Two students from a national school.

Hao Yu and Chi Ren (2013) stated that when students learning the L2, they will consciously or unconsciously tend to utilise their former information when it comes to comprehension, analysis, thinking, and comparison, so that they will use the experience procured in the process of learning their L1 to direct them to master a new language. According to Sabbah (2016) "Transfer can be categorised into two types, namely positive transfer and negative transfer. The process of using rules from L1 which facilitates or has a positive influence on learning L2 is called the positive transfer. This transfer is mainly because of similarities

between L1 and L2. By comparison, negative transfer is the transfer of rules from L1 which precludes or has harmful impingement on the command of rules of L2. This is due to differences between L1 and L2". Therefore, a correct understanding of the role of L1 in the acquisition of a second language is a great significance to identify the tenses which have been transferred negatively and positively from L1 (Bahasa Melayu) to L2 (English).

In accordance with research by Erarslan and Hol (2014), when languages have a lot of commonalities, the individual has the tendency to translate from one language to another. But then, some languages are very different from one another in many aspects and features. As claimed by Alexandra Cabrera Soalano et al, (2014), this often results in interference which causes adverse or negative effects. The issue is to what extent is SLA and first language acquisition similar or different and to what extent is the interference in students' writing specially students from national schools. Javed and Phil (2012) opine that it is therefore fundamental that language teachers and language learners know the structure of both second language and mother tongue because such understanding enables the language learners to identify the areas of interference of mother tongue on second language.

II. METHODS

This is a qualitative case study in one of the schools in Perak, Malaysia. The research is aimed at investigating the influence of first language (L1) on the tenses used in writing English essays among Form Two secondary students. Data was obtained through the use of in-depth structured interviews with six students and document analysis.

Twenty three Form Two Malay students were selected from a national secondary school in Ipoh, Perak which comprises both genders. Seven out of these 24 students will be interviewed. The sample is from the same classroom and it is adequate to provide a clear picture of the problem that is the interference of Bahasa Melayu (L1) in English (L2) tenses in writing among the students. This is a nonprobability sampling which is purposive selection. According to Merriam (1998), using purposive sampling allows researchers to understand a phenomenon in depth. Most of the students are poor in English language proficiency and require extra attention. This school is from Form One to Form Five and most of the students are Malay students which are relevant to the study. The sample has 8 years of learning Bahasa Melayu and English language as a second language in a formal setting. No reference group was used in this study as it was not necessary. The subjects lived in an exclusively Malay speaking community and had learnt English language as a second language during their primary and secondary school era in a formal setting. The classes are streamed according to the student's accomplishment in examinations. It is a two-session school with science and arts studies which is in the morning. The school is located nearby to shops lots and with good public bus services.

Data is collected from 24 Form Two students, each of whom was given 3 essays to write in about 100 words. Each of the 3 essays was given on different dates. The researcher read and analysed the essays written by the students to identify the errors on tenses made by the students in their essays. The results of the errors made will be tabulated and categorised according to the tenses. The essays used in the classroom will provide valuable information (provided the written work was not directly copied from the teacher's notes) pertaining to students' L1 (Bahasa Melayu) interference in the L2 writing. Therefore, the researcher only analysed written materials that were done by the students without the teacher's help or guidance. The tabulated tenses were later compared and corroborated to substantiate the theoretical arguments in the field of language transfer.

The researcher also conducts a semi-structured interview with seven Form Two students from the same classroom. Interviews are adequate to investigate the topic or phenomena not directly observable. Moreover, interviews are interactive thus the researcher can obtain more information to draw conclusions. During the interview session, both the researcher and interviewees can make clarifications about the reasons for tenses transferred negatively and positively from L1 to L2. The interview consisted of a list of questions prepared in advance to remain focused on the research and the questions were based on the research question derived earlier. Each interview lasted for about 30 minutes and it was audio taped. The researcher transcribed the interview into text data. The responses from the interview would support the findings gathered from the essays.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this research is to identify the tenses that have been transferred negatively and positively from L1, the sentences were analyzed in each of the essays and noted the errors in translation. The results are presented in Table 1 for negative translation as the researcher found errors of negative translations. There is no positive translation found in the three essays among the students.

Negative translation is the transfer of rules from L1 which has harmful effects on students writing in L2.

Based on Table 1, the maximum number of negative translations was observed for essay I (My Family) which is supposed to be in present tense. Based on the frequency of students attempted, the highest number of negative translations occurred in essay I (My family); twenty students (20/24, 83.3%) did more than two negative translations and four students (4/24, 12.5%) did two negative translations. Following this, negative translations also occurred frequently in essay II (My Holidays) which is supposed to be in simple past tense; three students (3/24, 12.5%) did one negative translation while sixteen students did more than two negative translations (16/24, 66.7%) for the essay. Moreover, four students (4/24, 16.7%) did one negative translation; three

students (3/24, 12.5%) made one negative translation and nine students did more than two negative translations (9/24, 37.5%) in writing essay III (If I Were a Millionaire) which is in simple future tense.

Table 1: Negative Translation

| | Range | Total Translation, n (%) | | | |
|-------------------------|--------|--------------------------|----------|----------|---------------|
| | | None | One | Two | More than two |
| My Family | 2 - 15 | 0 | 0 | 4(16.7) | 20(83.3) |
| My Holidays | 1 - 13 | 0 | 3 (12.5) | 5(20.8) | 16 (66.7) |
| If I were a Millionaire | 0 - 7 | 8 (33.3) | 4(16.7) | 3 (12.5) | 9 (37.5) |

From this analysis, it can be deduced that the L2 tense mostly transferred negatively from L1 were present tense in 'My family' essay and simple past tense in 'My holidays'. In addition, simple future tense is most least being transferred negatively. The following are some of the extracts from students' essays.

MY FAMILY

Present Simple Tense

Present simple tense is used for facts about the world and ourselves, fixed routines, feelings, thoughts, and senses and to give instructions and directions. The present simple is formed by adding 's' or 'es' to the he/she/it form, and using do/does for negatives and questions. Extract from essay I: 'My Family'.

Student 1

"She is brave." (English) is written as "She brave."

Bahasa Melayu: Dia berani.

"Sometimes she has a problem to solve." (English) is written as "Sometime she got a problem she try to solve the problem."

Bahasa Melayu: "Kadang-kala dia ada masalah yang perlu diselesaikan."

"He finds some money to take from his family." (English) is written as "He find some money to take of his family."

Bahasa Melayu: Dia mencari sedikit duit untuk menjaga keluarganya.

"She is not working but she helps my family to do business until success." (English) is written as "She not working but she help my family with do business until success."

Bahasa Melayu: Dia tidak bekerja tetapi dia membantu keluarga saya menjalankan perniagaan sehingga berjaya.

Student 3

"My mother has nine siblings." (English) is written as *"My mother have nine siblings."*

Bahasa Melayu: Ibu saya mempunyai Sembilan orang adik beradik."

Student 4

"My father is so funny and cute." (English) is written as *"My father so funny and cute."*

Bahasa Melayu: Ayah saya sangat kelakar dan comel.

Student 7

"My mother works in Carsem factory and my father works as a business man." (English) is written as *"My work mother is factory Carsem and my father work is business man."*

Bahasa Melayu: Ibu saya berkerja di kilang Carsem dan ayah saya berkerja sebagai ahli perniagaan.

Student 9

"He studies at SK Pakatan Jaya." (English) is written as *"He study in SK Pakatan Jaya."*

Bahasa Melayu: Dia belajar di SK Pakatan Jaya.

Student 13

"He lives in Alor Setar Kedah." (English) is written as *"He's live in Alor Setar Kedah."*

Bahasa Malaysia: Dia tinggal di Alor Setar Kedah.

Student 15

"He studies at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Tambun." (English) is written as *"He study at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Tambun."*

Bahasa Malaysia: Beliau belajar di Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Tambun.

Student 20

"My dad also reminds us if we made a mistake." (English) is written as *"My dad also remind us if we made a mistakes"*.

Bahasa Malaysia: Ayah saya juga mengingatkan kami jika kami membuat kesilapan.

MY HOLIDAYS

Past Simple Tense

Past simple is used to talk about things that already happened before. The past simple tense is formed by adding 'ed' to regular verbs but there are many irregular verbs. For negative sentences and questions is formed by using did/did not. Extracts as below are from the essay by my family.

Student 1

"In the morning, we got some food and went to dreamland to play some extreme games." (English) is written as *"In the*

morning, we get some food and go to dreamland to playing some extreme game."

Bahasa Melayu: Pada waktu pagi, kami telah pergi untuk mendapatkan makanan dan pergi ke 'dreamland' untuk bermain permainan ekstrem.

"He finds some money to take from his family." (English) is written as *"He find some money to take of his family."*

Bahasa Melayu: Dia mencari sedikit duit untuk menjaga keluarga dia.

Student 2

"I chose Hatyai for holiday because Hat Yai is interesting." (English) is written as *"My choose Hat yai for holiday because Hat Yai is interesting."*

Bahasa Melayu: Saya telah memilih Hat Yai untuk pergi bercuti kerana Hat Yai menarik.

Student 3

"My mother works at Telekom Malaysia." (English) is written as *"My mother occupations is a Telekom Malaysia."*

Bahasa Melayu: Ibu saya berkerja di Telekom Malaysia.

Student 4

"In the evening we went out to buy some food." (English) is written as *"In evening we out for buy some food."*

Bahasa Melayu: Pada waktu petang kami telah keluar untuk membeli makanan.

"Mom works as a nurse, she is such a beautiful woman and so kind." (English) is written as *"Mum work as nurse, she so beautiful woman and so kind."*

Bahasa Melayu: Ibu bekerja sebagai jururawat, dia adalah wanita yang sangat cantik dan begitu baik.

Student 6

"First, we went to RNR because my family and I took a rest about 1-2 hours." (English) is written as *"First, we go to RNR because my family and I take a rest about 1-2 hours."*

Bahasa Melayu: Pertama sekali, kami pergi ke RNR terlebih dahulu kerana keluarga saya ingin berehat dalam 1-2 jam .

"Next, I reach there at 2 pm." (English) is written as *"Next, I reached there at 2 pm."*

Bahasa Melayu: Seterusnya, saya sampai di sana pada pukul 2 petang.

Student 7

"My family and I visited Pangkor Island." (English) is written as *"My family and I was visited to Pangkor Island."*

Bahasa Melayu: Saya dan keluarga telah pergi melawat Pulau Pangkor. "

"My mother works in a Carsem factory and my father works as a businessman." (English) is written as *"My work mother is factory Carsem and my father work is business man."*

Bahasa Melayu: *Ibu saya berkerja di kilang carsem dan ayah saya berkerja sebagai ahli perniagaan.*

Student 9

"We arrived in Langkawi at 12 o'clock." (English) is written as *"We arose in Langkawi at 12 o'clock."*

Bahasa Melayu: *Kami tiba di Langkawi pada pukul 12 pagi.*

"He studies at SK Pakatan Jaya." (English) is written as *"He study in SK Pakatan Jaya."*

Bahasa Melayu: *Dia belajar di SK Pakatan Jaya.*

Student 11

"After we checked in, we went to Idaman Suri Supermall." (English) is written as *"After, we check in, we went to Idaman Suri Supermall."*

Bahasa Malaysia: *Setelah itu, kami masuk ke Idaman Suri Supermall.*

"My mother likes to cook and her dishes are so delicious." (English) is written as *"My mother like too cook and her dishes is so delicious."*

Bahasa Melayu: *Ibu saya suka memasak dan hidangannya sangat lazat.*

Student 22

"Next, I reached there at 2p.m." (English) is written as *"Next, I reach at there at 2p.m."*

Bahasa Malaysia: *Seterusnya, saya sampai di sana pada pukul 2 petang.*

"I study at SMK Tambun." (English) is written as *"I school at SMK Tambun."*

Bahasa Melayu: *Saya bersekolah di SMK Tambun.*

IF I WERE A MILLIONAIRE

Simple future tense

This essay should be written in simple future tense as it is generally about their future as a millionaire. English verbs do not have a future form in the way that they have a present or past simple form. Instead 'be going to', 'will' and 'simple present tense 'are to talk about the future. Extract from 'If I were a millionaire' essay as follows.

Student 2

"After that my family and I will travel to Paris, London, and German." (English) is written as *"After that I and my family travel to Paris, London, and German."*

Bahasa Melayu: *Selepas itu saya dan keluarga saya akan pergi ke Paris, London, dan Jerman.*

"I will buy a Condominium." (English) is written as *"I went to buy Condominium."*

Bahasa Melayu: *Saya akan membeli kondominium.*

Student 4

"I will buy a big house for my family, in my house I will have a swimming pool, gym, and many more." (English) is written as *"I will buy a big house for my family, in my house have a swimming pool, gym, and many more."*

Bahasa Melayu: *Saya akan membeli rumah besar untuk keluarga saya, di rumah saya akan mempunyai kolam renang, gim, dan banyak lagi.*

"I will use my money to bring my family for travelling and make them happy." (English) is written as *"I use my money for bought my family travel and make them happy."*

Bahasa Melayu: *Saya menggunakan wang saya untuk membawa keluarga saya untuk melancong dan membuat mereka gembira.*

Student 6

"Next, I will go shopping to buy home things and I will buy a car." (English) is written as *"Next, I went to shopping to buy a home things and I go to buy a car."*

Bahasa Melayu: *Seterusnya, saya akan pergi membeli barangan rumah dan sebuah kereta.*

"Next, I will buy a home." (English) is written as *"Next, I buy a home."*

Bahasa Melayu: *Seterusnya, saya membeli sebuah rumah.*

"Then, I will buy a pet shop." (English) is written as *"Then, I buy a pet shop next."*

Bahasa Melayu: *Kemudian, saya membeli sebuah kedai haiwan kesayangan.*

"I will buy a handphome, some gadgets and other things." (English) is written as *"I buy a handphome, gadgets and other."*

Bahasa Melayu: *Saya akan membeli sebuah telefon bimbit, peralatan digital dan lain-lain.*

"Next, I will go on holiday and I will hire a contractor to make a school. I will open a bakery shop and lastly I will donate some money to orphanages." (English) is written as *"Next, I went to go holidays and I hired a contractor to make a school I want to open a bakery shop and last I donated some money for orphan."*

Bahasa Melayu: *Seterusnya, saya akan pergi bercuti dan saya mengupah seorang kontraktor untuk membina sebuah sekolah yang saya mahu membuka kedai roti dan akhirnya saya akan menyumbangkan wang untuk anak yatim.*

Student 7

"If I go to Kuala Lumpur, I will also go to Malacca." (English) is written as *"Then if I go to Kuala Lumpur I went go to Melaka."*

Bahasa Melayu: *Selepas itu, jika saya kaya, saya akan pergi ke Melaka.*

Student 16

If I were a millionaire, I would go to Indonesia with my family because it is interesting. (English) is written

"If I were a millionaire I when to Indonesia with my family because it is interesting."

Bahasa Melayu: *Jika saya seorang jutawan, saya akan pergi ke Indonesia bersama keluarga saya kerana ia adalah tempat yang menarik.*

Student 20

"With the remainder I will keep it for important things." (English) is written as *"With balance money I have I need keep it for important things."*

Bahasa Melayu: *Saya akan menyimpan baki wany yang ada untuk perkara-perkara penting.*

"I will use it if I want something that I need." (English) is written as *"I will used it if I want something that I need."*

Bahasa Melayu: *Saya akan menggunakannya jika saya mahukan sesuatu yang saya perlukan.*

"I will also use that money to buy shoes, clothes, scarf and many more." (English) is written as *"That money I also use for buy a shoes, clothes, scarf and many more."*

Bahasa Melayu: *Dengan duit itu juga saya akan gunakan untuk membeli kasut, pakaian, selendang dan banyak lagi.*

Responses from Interview Session

This interview was carried out with seven students from the same classroom. It was carried after the completion of the three essays. The researcher recorded the interview session and transcript as the best method of recording. Furthermore, the researcher can listen many times to the interview which was recorded to get the accurate results of the research. The focus was on the students themselves and each question was examined from their perspectives.

The researcher asked four questions on students' learning strategies as follows.

1. Do you think Bahasa Melayu helps you in writing English language? Why?
2. Do you think in Bahasa Melayu before you write in English language?
3. Do you write in Bahasa Melayu before you write in English language?

4. Do you follow the same structure of Bahasa Melayu word by word when writing in English language?

The researcher asked the students if they think Bahasa Melayu helps them when writing in English language, seven students responded yes as it will help them in their writing. For example Student 5 mentioned "I don't remember the tenses ... I will write in Malay and I will translate it." Student 7 said "I can translate it to English." Student 9 stated "Because Bahasa Melayu is easy", Student 11 stated "because can translate." and Student 22 admitted he translates. In contrast Student 18 is the only one who mentioned 'no' as an answer "because I think in English."

"Do you think in Bahasa Melayu before you write in English?" The researcher checked with the students and found six students who think in Bahasa Melayu before writing in English language. Only one student is Student 18 who does not think Bahasa Melayu before writing in English language.

The researcher asked if he or she does not understand a word and what do they normally do as follows are the students' replies.

Student 1: *keep quite*

Student 5: *I will ask my friends, teachers or my parents,*

Student 7: *search in dictionary*

Student 9: *I ask teacher*

Student 11: *I ask my mom, teacher or my sibling or dictionary*

Student 18: *ask teacher and check dictionary*

Student 22: *ask teacher*

Based on the replies, the researcher found that most students prefer asking the teacher for clarifications. Next step is using the dictionary to find any difficult words.

The researcher questioned the students if they write in Bahasa Melayu before writing in English language. Four students responded yes as they do write in Bahasa Melayu before writing in English language and the rest of the three students which are Student 5, Student 7, and Student 22 straight write in English language.

The researcher then checked if the students do follow the same structure of Bahasa Melayu word by word when they write in English language. Surprisingly all answered yes as they do follow the same structure of Bahasa Melayu word by word when writing in English language. Lao, Y. A. (2017) study also support that the students always think of the meaning of the sentences in their first language, then translate it into English, and finally write it in English. This study strongly supports the researcher's findings when interviewed the seven students.

According to the research, it is understandable that the students involved in this study use their understanding of their

mother tongue in writing of English language. As compared to the English language, students are more familiar with their mother tongue. This supports Muriungi & Mbui (2013) who claimed that mother tongue has a strong interference over writing English language among the high school students.

The findings also showed all the students have problems to distinguish the tenses for each essay. This similarly coincides with Hao Yu and Chi Ren (2013) statement that learners learn the L2 will consciously or unconsciously apply their previous information to gain knowledge. This is where the L2 learners tend to process information from their L1 to master their L2. This may seem parallel to Sabbah (2016) and Alexandra Cabrera Soalano et al, (2014), that rules from L1 which has negative impact on the command of rules of L2. On the other hand, those learners who are incompetent in English language (L2) seem to use to Bahasa Melayu (L1) rules in their writings.

During the interview session most of the students agreed that Bahasa Melayu helps them in writing English essays. This supports Musa, Koo and Azman (2012) where they mentioned that Bahasa Melayu strongly influences the learning of English among students. This relates to the claims by Gvarishvili (2013) and Gedion, Tati and Peter (2016) that it is an unconscious process where students tend to use translation methods to write in L2 which results in negative transfer. This is parallel to Darmi and Albion (2013) that standard of English is declining among most Malaysian students due to the change of medium instruction from English to Bahasa Melayu. It is also found that students prefer to refer to their teachers for any difficulties in learning English. This supports Muriungi and Mbui (2013) that schools play a major role to motivate their students in a number of ways such as providing essential resources in facilitating learning of English.

As a note, the majority of the learners seem to have very little knowledge of English language as they have problems in writing using the correct English language tenses. This led them to use translations of what they are required to be mindful of in their mother tongue. As denoted by Javed and Phil (2012) , it is necessary for language teachers and language learners to understand the structure of both mother tongue and second language as the knowledge facilitates the language learners to recognize the ranges of interference of mother tongue on second language.

The findings from this research provide a clear analysis of the end product for the students that learn the English language as the second language. This research also demonstrates the extent and effects of the first language interference with the second language which is English language. This supports Karim and Nassaji (2013) who claimed that L2 learners may choose their L1 to compensate for their inadequacies in the L2 knowledge. This relates to a claim by Maisarah (2016) that students will use their knowledge from their mother tongue to help them in the English writing process that then indicates direct interference to their second language. Chomsky's

Universal Grammar indicates that the unmarked settings of 'parameters' properties of grammar that generally differ between one language may be transmitted before marked setting.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study has focused on three tenses which the students had difficulties to write using the correct tenses in their essay writing. These tenses are simple present tense, simple past tense and simple future tense. From the findings it has proved that students still rely on their L1 (Bahasa Melayu) in their writing. Students tend to use their L1 rules (Bahasa Melayu) to translate their sentence into L2 (English) unconsciously of the English language rules. This study also revealed that exposure towards the English language from the age of 7 years old in Malaysian education system still does not assure the students to be able to master the language.

There have been a very few studies done on the twelve English language tenses. It is noticeable that most of the students are not aware of the usage of many tenses as they are only familiar with present simple tense, present continuous tense, simple past tense and simple future tense 'will'. This is because the researcher found almost all of the students did not use other English language tenses in their three written essays which were given to them for this research purpose.

V. RECOMMENDATION

This study strongly recommends that ESL teachers spend more of their class time focusing on the error prone areas. Moreover, this can be done by giving emphasis to the twelve tenses in detail rather than in a few lessons. One of the important strategies is a teacher's role to motivate their students to work harder and guide them to improve English language by advising them the effects of using direct translation from their first language. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the online platforms are also useful to enhance students' interest in acquiring a second language such as kahoot, google classroom and jamboard. Future researchers may integrate observations in the classroom and conduct interviews with the English language teachers who are teaching the beginner level of secondary school students to identify the successful or unsuccessful strategies and methods which are applied by them. Furthermore, teachers can try using a direct method for the beginner level of students. In direct method, the teacher avoids translation or explanation and grammar is presented by way of examples and students asked to induce the grammatical rule that the examples exemplify. Moreover, this will assist the future researchers to examine direct methods to teach students who have low proficiency in English language.

Limitation

Limitation of this research is it focuses only on secondary school students in Ipoh, Perak. Therefore, more research is needed to survey the errors in writing made by secondary students of multiracial in Malaysia to identify if Bahasa

Melayu which is also the national language of the country has a negative impact towards mastering English language.

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