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# HE EFFECTIVENESS OF CONTROLLED WRITTEN METALINGUISTIC CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN IMPROVING WRITING

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# **DEDICATION**

To my beloved Appa and Amma

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This study was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of the Written Corrective Metalinguistic Feedback in Improving Students' Writing. The research was conducted to see if the Metalinguistic feedback is more effective for the High English Proficiency students or the Low English Proficiency students. The study was on controlled marking. Therefore, the study only focused on correcting students' usage of the Simple Past Tense. The research problems were 1) How effective was the written corrective Metalinguistic Feedback among Low English Proficiency students? 2) How effective was the written corrective Metalinguistic feedback among the High English Proficiency students? 3) The correlation between students opinion of the metalinguistic feedback and their improvement in writing. Pre-Test, Post Test 1 and Post Test 2 were carried out among 30 High English proficiency students and 30 Low English Proficiency students. T-Test was carried out to see effectiveness in the metalinguistic feedback. For the third research objective, Pearson Correlation test was carried out to see the correlation between students' opinion of the written corrective Metalinguistic feedback and their improvement in writing. The result of the study seem to show that the Low English Proficiency students seem to benefit more from the written corrective Metalinguistic feedback and they are more keen to see metalinguistic feedback as compared to the High English proficiency group. It is hoped that with teachers support more students would appreciate this technique of marking. Besides, more students can benefit from this technique of marking with integration of grammar and vocabulary lessons.

#### **ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini dijalankan bagi menyiasat keberkesanan teknik menanda menggunakan respon penandaan Metalinguistik. Kajian ini dijalankan di Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Tun Haji Abdul Malek, 75250 Cheng, Melaka. Seramai 30 pelajar-pelajar yang fasih dalam Bahasa Inggeris dan 30 pelajar-pelajar yang lemah dalam Bahasa Inggeris terlibat dalam kajian ini. Pelajar-pelajar yang terlibat dalam kajian ialah pelajar Tingkatan Empat dan terdiri daripada pelajar-pelajar lelaki dan perempuan. Objektif kajian ini ialah untuk melihat 1) Adakah teknik metalinguistik berkesan terhadap pelajar-pelajar yang lemah dalam penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris 2) Adakah teknik metalinguistik berkesan terhadap pelajarpelajar yang fasih dalam penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris 3) Adakah korelasi antara pendapat pelajar terhadap penandaan Metalinguistik dan peningkatan dalam mutu penulis pelajar? Pelajar-pelajar menulis tiga karangan. Karangan pertama ialah untuk Pra-Ujian 1 dimana mereka menulis laporan berdasarkan gambar bersiri. Guru menanda karangan mereka menggunakan teknik Metalinguistik. Untuk Pasca Ujian 1, pelajar-pelajar menulis karangan yang sama. Untuk Pasca Ujian 2, pelajar-pelajar menulis karangan berdasarkan gambar bersiri yang berbeza. Guru akan menanda karangan berkenaan tetapi hanya berfokuskan keatas penggunaan "Simple Past Tense". Seterusnya, mutu penulisan dan pendapat pelajarpelajar terhadap penandaan Metalinguistik diuji menggunakan formula Pearson. Keputusan pengiraan menunjukkan pelajar-pelajar yang lemah lebih berminat terhadap penandaan Metalinguistik. Mutu penulisan kumpulan ini juga menunjukkan perubahan positif. Adalah diharapkan bahawa dengan integrasi perbendaharaan kata dan motivasi dari guru-guru teknik ini akan member manfaat kepada pelajar-pelajar.

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#### **CHAPTER 1**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

#### 1.0 Introduction

English is being taught formally in schools since the age of seven in Malaysia. According to Jalaludin (2008; 106) Malaysia has accorded English as a second language status as stated in Article 152 and nevertheless after 11 years of continuous years of learning English the result is less than satisfactory.

All four skills; reading writing, speaking and listening are incorporated in the teaching of the English language in Malaysia which emphasizes on the development of students communicative competence as outlined by the KBSR in primary schools and KBSM in the secondary schools. However, despite having exposed to learning to use all the four skills for 11 years in both primary and secondary school, according to Jalaluddin (2008) most obvious weakness of students in producing a good piece of writing is in their usage of grammar.

Teachers should be able to prepare students with either skill mentioned above in order to enable students to produce a grammatically sound piece of writing. Teachers can prepare students with the necessary knowledge on the English grammar by just completing the English Language syllabus as outlined by the Ministry of Education. However, it will be a challenging task for teachers to prepare students to be aware of errors in the writing. One way of preparing students to be aware of errors is by giving them written corrective feedback. According to Ellis (2009: 3) the role of feedback has a place in most theories of second language learning and language pedagogy. In both behaviorist and cognitive theories of second language learning, feedback is seen as contributing to language learning. On both structural and communicative approaches to language teaching, feedback is viewed as a means of fostering learner motivation and ensuring linguistic accuracy.

Although it has been established that feedback is crucial in language learning, choosing the more effective from of feedback is very crucial for teachers to enhance second language learners' language acquisition. There are various types of corrective feedback and only written corrective feedback is looked into in this study. According to analysis of studies by Kepner (1991), Semke (1984) and Sheppard (1992), there is no convincing research evidence—that error correction ever helps student writers improve the accuracy of their writing. However, research done by Sheen (2007) seems to show that students who received metalinguistic written corrective feedback seems to show lesser errors in their writing.

Therefore, in this study the effectiveness of controlled direct corrective feedback in low proficiency students and high proficiency students will be looked into. A class of 30 low proficiency students and another class of 30 High proficiency students will be given metalinguistic corrective feedback based on a Pre – Test essay. The corrective feedback will be a controlled corrective feedback as the focus will only be on the usage of simple past tense.

#### 1.1 Background of Study

How teachers correct second language (L2) students' writing is a topic that has attracted enormous interest from researchers and teachers. However, Hyland and Hyland (2006) observed that while feedback is a central aspect of L2 writing programs across the world, the research literature has not been equivocally positive about its role in L2 development, and teachers often have a sense they are not making use of its full potential.

At present, choosing the more effective type of written corrective feedback is a challenge among teachers. Especially in Malaysian context, a typical Malaysian school has both Low English proficiency students and High English proficiency students. Therefore, teachers need to identify a suitable corrective feedback according to individual students' proficiency level. Thus, this study aims to find out whether metalinguistic feedback is more beneficial for which proficiency group; Low English Proficiency or High English Proficiency.

Teachers seem to have a difficult task of bringing out the full potential of giving feedback. According to Guenette (2007) to resolve inefficiencies related to corrective feedback researchers and teachers should systematically identify the various options available for correcting students' writing as a basis for both designing future studies and pedagogical decision making.

According to Ellis (2009), there are 6 categories of written corrective feedback; direct CF, Indirect CF, Metalinguistic CF, Focus of the Feedback, Electronic Feedback and Reformulation. Metalinguistic CF involves providing learners with some form of explicit comment about the nature of errors they have made. The explicit comments can take two forms. By far the most common is the use of error codes. These consist of abbreviated errors for different kinds of errors. The labels can be placed over the location of the error in the text or in the margin. In the latter case, the exact location of the error may or may not be shown. In the former, the student has to work out the correction needed from the clue provided while in the latter the students needs to work out the error and then work out the correction.

As quoted above, there are two types of metalinguistic corrective feedback. In this study, the effectiveness of the first type of written metalinguistic corrective feedback will be analyzed in this study. Ellis (2009) commented the idea that the second type of Metalinguistic corrective feedback is much more time consuming than using error codes and

also it calls for the teacher to possess sufficient metalinguistic knowledge to be able to write clear and accurate explanations for a variety of errors. Thus, this study focuses on Direct Metalinguistic feedback. Research done by Sheen (2007) echoes the idea that although direct and metalinguistic corrective feedback were both effective in increasing students accuracy. The difference between direct and indirect written corrective feedback will be discussed in Chapter 2.

The effectiveness of Controlled Metalinguistic Corrective Feedback in students acquiring a particular grammar item in this context The Simple Past Tense is looked into. Based on the questionnaires, we can see students' reaction towards written corrective feedback. As it is very crucial for educators to study the effectiveness of our teaching methods in our local context and written corrective feedback is the most popular way of correcting students' accuracy in using the English language in a classroom.

#### 1.3 Statement of Problem

Lack of accuracy in writing has been a problem among Malaysian secondary school students and whether to correct or not to correct has always been a central concern among teachers and researchers in both first and second language writing. Another crucial decision teachers have to make is the type of written corrective feedback that will be effective for students language acquisition. Nunan (1992) echoes to this fact as teachers only make 14 % decision involving correction.

According to Ellis (2009), there are four types of written corrective feedback which are Direct Correction, Indirect Correction, Coded Corrective feedback and Metalinguistic correction. Studies done by Sheen (2007) seem to show positive improvement among second language learners who are given metacognitive corrective feedback. Metalinguistic corrective feedback is a new technique in giving written corrective feedback. Research in

written corrective feedback does not seem to show if the metalinguistic corrective feedback will be more useful for Low Proficiency students or the High proficiency students or both. This knowledge is crucial as most Malaysian day schools have both these categories of students.

Low Proficiency students may be demotivated to see a lot of written comments on their errors or may on the other hand appreciate the effort of highlighting their errors. To make things clearer to them, controlled corrective feedback is used to guide them which should not confuse them on many forms of grammar items at one go. High Proficiency students on the other hand may find the metalinguistic comments unnecessary for them. Finding out students' response towards the metalinguistic corrective feedback by giving out questionnaires can be useful as students should be able to relate to the comments or the entire effort writing such comments will be a waste. Therefore, this study is solely done to address the issue of lack of accuracy in writing. One of the ways to tackle lack of accuracy is by giving written corrective feedback and the effectiveness of the latest technique of giving metalinguistic corrective feedback is looked into.

#### 1.4 Purpose of the study

There are various types of written corrective feedback such as Direct feedback, Indirect Feedback, Coded feedback and Metalinguistic feedback. However, the effectiveness of the use metalinguistic corrective feedback will be looked into. Whether there is any reduction in the number of errors in the usage of Simple past Tense will also be looked into. The proficiency level of English in a typical Malaysian day school ranges from Low English proficiency to High English Proficiency. The reason for choosing to study the effectiveness of Metalinguistic Corrective Feedback among the Low English Proficiency and the High English Proficiency group is to see which group benefits the technique of feedback better.

The outcome of the study will be very beneficial for teachers as it should justify which group will benefit more from the metalinguistic corrective feedback. The feedback from the questionnaires are also very useful to see how teachers can make the feedback for approachable and accepted by students if students do not show preference to this kind of feedback.

#### 1.5 Research objective

The research objectives for this study are as follows:

- to what extent does controlled written metalinguistic feedback determine accuracy in writing among Low Proficiency students.
- 2. to what extent does controlled written metalinguistic feedback determine accuracy in writing among High Proficiency students.
- **3.** to find out whether students' opinion about the effectiveness of corrective feedback correlates improvement in writing.

#### 1.6 Research question

The research questions for this study are as follows:

- 1. How much does controlled metalinguistic feedback determine accuracy in writing among Low Proficiency students?
- 2. How much does controlled metalinguistic feedback determine accuracy in writing among High Proficiency students?
- 3. Does students' opinion about the effectiveness of controlled metalinguistic feedback correlates with the students' improvement in writing?

#### 1.7 Limitation

There are several limitations in this study. First, the sample size is small, consisting of 60 Form Four students from a secondary school from Cheng, Melaka.

This study involves only controlled marking as only errors in the usage Simple Past Tense is corrected. There are myriads of different kinds of errors done by students in their writing. Therefore, this study may not portray the actual effectiveness of the metalinguistic feedback as other different grammatical errors may show a variation in results.

Besides the selection of grammatical item analyzed in this study, the chosen genre may also be a drawback in getting a better feedback for the effectiveness of the metalinguistic corrective feedback. Some students may prefer other kinds of writing such as narratives, argumentative essays or factual essays. However, this study involved only writing a report as the focus is one the usage of Simple Past Tense. A report should consist of mainly Simple Past Tense.

Although, this study looks at students' opinion and the effectiveness of the metalinguistic corrective feedback, according to Amrhein & Nassaji (2001) error correction is a complex issue which is also echoed by Harmer (1990). Many other factors such as sociocultural context, individual needs and differences contribute towards the learning of the second language.

#### 1.8 Scope of Study

This study involves 60 form four students from a suburban secondary school. Only the improvement of the students' usage of the Simple Past Tense is looked into in this study. Other grammatical items such as the affixes, adverbs, adjectives, plural forms, copula, subject-verb agreement which contributes to 60 % of total mistakes committed by students (Jalaludin, 2008) are not looked into.

### 1.9 Significance of Study

In Malaysia, examination results are significant for students, parents and the society in the whole. According to Tan Kok Eng (2006;26) as an indication of Malaysian examination fever, a typical news reporting of nationwide standardized examination results ran as follows. Of the 471, 697 candidates who sat for the 2002 Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah UPSR) (Primary School Achievement Test), 22472 scored full distinctions (Indramalar, 2002a). Of the 391, 431 candidates who sat for the 2002 Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) Lower Secondary Assessment), 17, 994 (4.6%) obtained straight As (Indramalar, 2002, b). Thus, the media which highlight the excellent performance of both individuals and institutions also contribute to the importance given to students' writing ability.

As quoted above, examinations are taken seriously by students and teachers in Malaysia. Therefore, it is an English teachers' task at Upper Secondary school to prepare

students to write completely accurate essays as more than 50 % of the 1119 paper at Upper secondary level tests students writing skill with emphasis on writing.

Therefore, the main objective of this study is to see the effectiveness of the Written Corrective Metalinguistic Feedback in helping students' improve their writing skill.

#### 2.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this study on the effectiveness of using the coded metalinguistic corrective feedback will be beneficial for teachers and researchers to decide whether to further practice it in a language classroom according to their proficiency level or to adapt it according to learners' needs. Teacher trainers should also equip future ESL teachers with sufficient training to be able to give quality metalinguistic feedback.

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