THE EFFECT OF RECAST AND ELICITATION IN FOCUS ON FORM PEDAGOGIC TASK ON L2 LEARNERS' ORAL FLUENCY, ACCURACY, AND UPTAKE

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by

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To

My Father, My Mother, My Sister

And

My Mentor

Esmaeil Oroojzadeh

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ABSTRAK

Di dalam kelas bahasa, antara kesilapan yang dilakukan mungkin dalam penulisan, pertuturan, dan juga pemikiran. Bagaimana, jika, bila, apa keadaanya dan setakat mana kesilapan ini ditangani adalah keprihatinan semasa dalam penyelidikan berdasarkan perolehan bahasa. Dalam meta-analisisnya tentang maklum balas antarabangsa, Mackey dan Goo (2007) melaporkan bahawa penggunaan maklum balas adalah bermanfaat, dan mencari bukti bahawa maklum balas dalam konteks fokus terhadap persekitaran bentuk adalah juga memudahkan perolehan. Laporan ini mengulangi atau menyamai dapatan positif Norris dan Ortega (2000) tentang tumpuan terhadap penyelidikan bentuk. Justeru, peranan maklum balas didapati terbatas, sangat informatif, dan *niche* yang menyakinkan dalam penyelidikan dan pembinaan teori semasa. Terdapat kekurangan penyelidikan terutamanya tentang peranan dan kesan daripada bentuk maklum balas. Selain menyusun-semula (*recast)* gesaan (prompt) dalam bilik darjah bahasa kedua, yang memberi fokus dalam penggunaan bahasa sebagai satu cara untuk berkomunikasi, dan tidak terhadap pengobjektifan. Konteks ini mefokuskan pada bentuk, iaitu suatu intervensi pedagogi ringkas yang menganjak buat seketika fokus kelas daripada makna kepada bentuk linguistik (Long, 1991). Disebabkan gesaan mampu memberikan bentuk yang tepat (Lyster, 2004; Lyster & Saito, 2010), maka ia membolehkan pelajar mengetahui dan membetulkannya secara spontan (Lyster & Ranta, 1997), dan membuat

pengubahsuaian, pengertian yang dijana pelajar (student-generated uptake) (de Bot, 1996; Lyster & Izquierdo, 2009; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Swain & Lapkin, 1995), secara teorinya ia lebih sesuai bagi fokus terhadap konteks bentuk Kajian ini mengkaji peranan ini dari segi fungsi dan kecekapannya, membandingkan gesaan tersirat (implicit, prompt), elisitasi, dengan gesaan tersurat (explicit prompt), menyusun-semula (*recast*) pada kesilapan pertuturan pelajar dalam penggunaa struktur sasaran yang amat kompleks (Robinson, 2005, 2007, 2011), situasi kala lepas; situasi *there* dan *then* dalam bahasa Inggeris. Kecekapan sesuatu maklum balas diukur berdasarkan kefasihan, ketepatan dan keberhasilan/ daripada pengertian pelajar . Justeru, sama ada pelajar mampu atau tidak untuk memperbaiki diri sebagai hasil daripada intervensi kelompok / bayaan dan kemudian mencapai perkembangan melalui pengoperasian yang diperoleh dalam reka bentuk praujian (ujian sebelum) – pascaujian (ujian selepas). Kesignifikanan statistik melalui analisis ujian t ditunjukkan bagi . pengertian dengan elisitasi. Walau bagaimanapun, bagi ketepatan dan kefasihan, keputusan menunjukkan bahawa kumpulan yang menyusun semula diri mereka (recast group) juga mengatasi prestasi kumpulan elisitasi, sebagai hasil daripada peruntukan maklum balas semasa melakukan tugasan *there/then* yang kompleks Kajian ini dapat dianggap lebih terkemuka daripada kajian terdahulu. Hal ini kerana, ia mampu menunjukkan bahawa perkembangan tidak hanya ditemui pada pada keseluruhan tahap kelas, malahan juga pada sesetengah kes individu. Justeru, terdapat devolusi dari segi kebolehan para peserta daripada praujian hingga pascaujian, iaitu dari segi min skor. Sementara itu, sesetengah peserta menunjukkan perkembangan berdasarkan peningkatan skor dalam praujian kepada pascaujian. Hal ini mungkin disebabkan gabungan perkembangan daripada kesediaan dan maklum balas.

THE EFFECT OF RECAST AND ELICITATION IN FOCUS ON FORM PEDAGOGIC TASK ON L2 LEARNERS' ORAL FLUENCY, ACCURACY AND UPTAKE

ABSTRACT

In the language classroom, students' errors may be written, spoken, and even thought. How, under what conditions and to what degree these errors are treated is of current concern in research regarding language acquisition. In their meta-analysis of interactional feedback, Mackey and Goo (2007) report that the utilization of feedback is beneficial and they also find evidence that feedback within the context of a focus on form environment is also facilitative of acquisition, echoing Norris and Ortega's (2000) positive findings regarding focus on form research. Thus, the role of feedback has found a somewhat limited, very informative and equally persuasive niche in current theory building and research. There is a lack of research specifically addressing the role and effects of forms of feedback, other than recasts, namely prompts, in the second language classroom where the focus in on language use as a means of communication rather than the objectification of it. This context employs focus on form, a brief pedagogical intervention that momentarily shifts the focus of the class from meaning to linguistic form (Long, 1991). Because prompts withhold correct forms, encourage students to simultaneously notice and self-correct and push modified, student-generated uptake, they may be theoretically more appropriate for a focus on form context. This study examines this role in its function and efficacy comparing an implicit prompt, the elicitation, with an explicit prompt, recast on

students' spoken errors in the use of a very complex target structure (Robinson, 2005, 2007, 2011), the simple past tense; there and then situation in the English language. The efficacy of the feedback is measured through fluency, accuracy and successful student uptake. That is, whether or not students are able to self-repair as a result of their teacher-student interview and then achieve development through operationalization as mean gains in a pre-test/post-test design. Statistical significance through t-test analysis is shown for uptake with elicitation, however in accuracy and fluency the results showed that recast group outperformed the elicitation group as a result of feedback provision while performing the complex there/then task. This study stands out from previously published studies in that not only is there development at the whole class level, but in some individual cases, there is a devolution of participants' ability from the pre-test to the post-test in terms of mean scores. While some participants have shown development by a rise in their pre-test to post-test scores, this may be due to the combination of developmental readiness and the feedback.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

Researches in Second Language (L2) acquisition have been influenced greatly by the developmental research in First Language (L1) acquisition, which explored if there is any relevance to L2 context. As an early work, Dulay and Burt (1974b) believed that replicating the contexts of first language acquisition may lead to a favorable L2 acquisition. One of the pioneering ideas for replicating first language acquisition situation in the second language acquisition context was Krashen's (1985). Long (1985) in his former version of the interaction hypothesis, questioned Krashen's idea because he believed that the mutual interaction by itself would suffice for all that is needed for L2 to develop.

Research on interaction is conducted within the framework of the Interactive Hypothesis, which states that conversational interaction "facilitates language acquisition because it connects input (what learners hear and read); internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention; and output (what learners produce) in productive ways" (Long, 1994, pp. 451- 452). Interaction provides learners with opportunities to receive comprehensible input and feedback (Pica, 1994 Long, 1996; Gass, 1994) as well as to make changes in their own linguistic output (Swain, 1995).

The Interaction Hypothesis states that interaction facilitates Second Language Acquisition (SLA) because conversational and linguistic modifications that occur in discourse provide learners with necessary comprehensible linguistic input. This

approach is credited to Long (1996), who sought a way to bring together two major approaches in SLA: as he recognized the importance of conversation on the development of grammar. Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, a cognitive theory that stresses the importance of linguistic input in the Target Language (TL) that is slightly more advanced than what the learner has mastery of.

The current state of a learner's rule-based linguistic knowledge is designated as "i", while the slightly more advanced input is "i+1". Krashen's sees the relevance of social contextual factors as conversational gambits in securing more input for the learner, which eventually relate to the notion of an affective filter that is said to determine what input gets through to the brain's central language acquisition mechanism (Allwright, 1984). Long (1996) believes that what makes input to be comprehensible is modified interaction, or negotiation of meaning.

In Krashen's input hypothesis, comprehensible input itself remains the main causal variable, while Long claims that a crucial element in the language acquisition process is the modified input that learners are exposed to and the way in which other speakers interact in conversations with learners (Lightbown and Spada, 1999). Long (1983, in Gass, 2002) investigates conversations between a Native Speaker (NS) and Non-native Speaker (NNS) and proposes his interaction hypothesis as follows; Negotiation for meaning, and especially works of mutual exchange of discussion that cause the interactional modification by the NS or even more professional addressee, enhance the acquisition because" it connects input, internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive ways" (Gass, 2002, p. 174). In other words, interactional adjustments make input comprehensible, and comprehensible input promotes acquisition, thus interactional adjustments promote acquisition (Lightbown and Spada, 1999, p.30). Long believes that when meaning is

negotiated, input comprehensibility is usually increased and learners tend to focus on salient linguistic features (Ariza and Hancock, 2003). Caroll (2000) also summarizes Long's Interaction hypothesis as follows:

This feedback helps the language learners to attend to the differences between what they are receiving as input and what they are producing as output. Negotiation of meaning leads to modified interaction. That is, either the native speakers or other language users try to adjust their output in order to make their speech as comprehensible input to learners. For instance, native speakers in a conversation with non-native speakers try to reduce the speed of their speech intentionally. Modification of such kind which is done by native speakers when they are interacting with language learners or a less competent language user is sometimes called as Foreigner Discourse (FD). These speech adjustments are highly varied over individuals, depending on individual elements such as speech style, the discourse, social and cultural contexts. In FD, as an example, it is reported that while the speech adjustment is happening, the addressee tend to hear less idioms, slangs, and grammatically complex sentences but more concrete palpable shorter and less syntactically complex, etc. (Lightbown and Spada, 1999; Brown, 2000).

The native speaker occupies a curious position in applied linguistics (Long, 1983). On the one hand it is widely used as a benchmark for knowledge of a language (and as such attracts opposition because it excludes those who are not native speakers), and as a criterion for employment; on the other hand a definition of the native speaker is elusive. Unlike male-female differences, native speaker (NS) - non-native speaker (NNS) differences are not innate, but learnt and the learning is so well imprinted that the 'membership' it bestows is real and fixed. What this means is that the concept of the native speaker is not a fiction, but has the reality that

'membership', however informal, always gives. The native speaker is relied on to know what the score is, how things are done, because s/he carries the tradition, is the repository of 'the language'. The native speaker is also expected to exhibit normal control, especially in fluent connected speech (though in writing only after long period of education), and to have command of expected characteristic strategies of performance and of communication. A native speaker is also expected to 'know' another native speaker, in part because of an intuitive feel, but also in part because of a characteristic systematic set of indicators, linguistic, pragmatic and paralinguistic, as well as an assumption of shared cultural knowledge (Davis, 1991).

In this study, Levelt's (1989, 1993; Levelt et al. 1999) model of L1 production is used to help explain the effects of manipulating task on L2 learners' production. There are three reasons for choosing Levelt's model: firstly, Levelt's has been the most widely accepted and influential model in L2 production research, and therefore its use in this study will permit establishing comparisons to explanations and findings in other studies. It is believed that Levelt's production model, which is based on a long tradition of psycholinguistic research and on robust empirical findings, is relevant to this study because it complements the explanation of other processes which mediate language processing such as attention and memory. Levelt's model is based on findings that have primarily been the result of the study of speech errors (e.g. tip-of-tongue phenomenon or word substitution) in both normal speakers and speakers with language pathologies.

This initial view of L2 acquisition soon faced complications. Researches by DeKeyser (2000) and Johnson and Newport (1991) explained that L1 and L2 acquisition are different. For example, the immersion program based on Krashen's input hypothesis which meant to improve second language acquisition was not as

successful as the first language acquisition because the structure or the process of acquiring these two languages is different (Skehan, 2003). That is, communicative approaches which are totally based on immersion program, need some explicit (focused) instructions to be injected into the communicative activities, namely the saliency of input only, would be sufficient if accompanied with some instruction, either explicit or implicit (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Long & Robinson, 1998). As stated above, learners will benefit if teachers incorporate some instructions, while learners performing communicative tasks as they improve both interaction in the language they are undertaking and gaining some knowledge about language.

But according to Doughty (2001) within communicative methods, forms need to be brought into focus, however; there are many debates over this issue and its appropriateness (Ellis, 2003). There are also two other issues of this interpretation. That is pre-selecting the chunks of language and presenting those chunks in separated form, widely known as Presentation, Practice, and Production (PPP) approach and the order in the nature of language acquisition. In PPP lesson plan, as mentioned earlier, language features were preselected and presented to the language learners after which learners were provided with some drills to practice them until the learners acquire the mastery over those structures. The underlying theory of this approach was criticized by Skehan, (1996, p. 18) who says "the underlying theory for a PPP approach has now been discredited. The belief that a precise focus on a particular form leads to learning and automatization (that learner will learn what is taught in the order in which it is taught) no longer carries much credibility in linguistics or psychology". Considering the two versions of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the strong and weak version, (Davies, Criper, & Howatt, 1984, p. 279) says that through the weak version of CLT learners can be provided by

ample opportunities to practice English language for communication which in the end can be generalized to the real world and learners can take their language skills out of the classroom. However, on the other hand the strong version of CLT believes in the role of communication whereby language can be actually learnt.

>…so that it is not merely a question of activating an existing but inert knowledge of the language, but of stimulating the development of the language system itself. If the former could be described as 'learning to use' English, the latter entails 'using English to learn it. "

>(Skehan, 2003, p. 391)

The point here is "how learners are supported" in a context like this. "In other words, pre-selecting structures and contriving tasks to ensure their use will be counter-productive, and not engage acquisitional processes"(Skehan, 2003, p. 393). The pre-selection is totally different from the one in the PPP approach as in the prior one the specific grammatical structure is picked up to be brought up in the class implicitly whereas in the latter one the pre-selection stage is only a segmented part of language to be taught explicitly without any intention to implicit focus on the contextualization of that segmented part of the language.

However, in order for meaning to be simply transacted would endanger the nature of task because without any focus on form there would not be any continued progress (Ellis, 2003; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). According to Ellis (2005) learners are free to draw on different language resources: to get the given task done and accomplish the desired outcome. In Task-based language teaching, tasks are the basis/units of analysis of this approach in planning and syllabus design in language teaching (Ellis, 2003). Considerable amount of attention has been paid to task-based language learning and teaching in the past twenty years (Bygate, Skehan, & Swain,

2001; Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2007). Since the second language acquisition (SLA) researchers as well as language teachers have given the "task" an equal amount of credit. In particular, tasks "allow researchers to break down the complex, prolonged learning process into discrete segments with well-defined boundaries, thereby creating meaningful 'anchor points' in discussing the various dimensions (e.g. cognitive, affective) of L2 processing" (Dornyei & Kormos, 2000, p 276). For language teachers, tasks can be the fitting device for constructing the content and methodology of language teaching.

Furthermore, in communicative language teaching, tasks can be at the heart of planning for a communicative curriculum, mainly in situations whereby there are limited opportunities for more authentic communicative experiences (Ellis, 2003), and tasks themselves serve as communicative language activities. The priority of communicative meaning makes task-based instruction appealing in that the authentic classroom communication is likely to lead to a desirable communicative success in real world situations.

In relation to language production, three areas need to be distinguished: Complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF). Skehan (2003) states that for learners to improve their interlanguage, their underlying system will undergo changes, that is, as the individual learners try to use more abstract words and complex structures as they are learning. This stage is followed by the decrease in the error whereby language learners try to master the newly introduced language part therefore to utilize them in a correct way. In the end, learners can have a fluent communication without any pause as well as avoiding the errors in the real life communication, where learners gain an advanced level of control over their interlanguage.

These three areas of complexity, accuracy, and fluency, have overlapping performance and developmental phases. If tasks lead to increases in either one of complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF), then they have different implications in language development (Gilabert, 2005). TBLT received significant attention for years since tasks of different types tend to improve either of these three mentioned areas or a combination of them. Most researchers in this area are interested in the way TBLT affects L2 learners' performance and influence the language production (Robinson, 2001a; Skehan, 2003). The complexity and accuracy dimensions of language production entail form while fluency covers the meaning and authentic communication. Skehan and Foster (1999) argue that complexity involves modification and development.

The concern, according to Long (1983) and Long & Robinson (1998), is how to insert sufficient amount of the language system in a meaning-based context to keep the flow of communication while mastering linguistic features. Over the past 20 years, tasks have been taken as a well-established unit in designing a communicative curriculum. These communicative approaches are designed to integrate, as much as possible, the realistic communication in the course of L2 learning on the grounds that being involved in meaning-based communication that would lead to the acquisition (Crabbe, 2007). Quite a number of researches focused on tasks, primarily their components, types, characteristics, and their implementation conditions (Albert & Kormos, 2004). Since Skehan (1996) differentiates three different aspects of task response, namely accuracy, fluency and complexity, task-based studies have chiefly been concerned with analyzing the impacts of task design and implementation variables on the fluency, complexity, and accuracy, of language in producing speech. Later, a large number of studies have investigated and analyzed this three-way

relationship regarding tasks (Foster & Skehan, 1999; Skehan & Foster, 1999; Bygate et al., 2001; Robinson, 2001b, 2005; Gilabert, 2005, 2007; Rahimpour, 2007; Ortega, 2009).

A variety of approaches and methods have been proposed to improve learners' Inter-Language (IL) but the choice of the way they deal with Form is not a straightforward one. With this in mind it seems worthy to the researcher that, according to the existing literature, there also exist different ways of focusing on form and different types of corrective feedback within the task-based interaction. To deal with purely communicative approach problems and enhance learners' accuracy, two major methods have been proposed. First, to motivate language learners to focus on target forms by noticing input (Ellis, 1994; Doughty & Williams, 1998; Basturkmen, Loewen, & Ellis, 2002) thus assisting in their processing. Schmidt (1990) defines intake as the part of the input that learners notice and by this sentence he differentiates with recognition which is a deeper and wider concept whereby the learners grasp the principles and rule compared to noticing. For example, an L2 learner could possibly notice the specific structure is used to talk about a particular situation or even in a more advanced level the importance of that particular form in addressing that situation. That is, noticing implies that what sort of linguistic elements are worked on in the memory.

To prepare second language learners with ample opportunities to produce output containing pieces of target language forms which will again enable learners to pay attention to the gap between their present state of target language competence and the ability to use those target form correctly or native-like (Swain, Gass, & Madden, 1985; Swan, 2005).

Ellis (1997) identified two areas in SLA, input/interaction and the role of Form Focused Instruction (FFI). Based on the study of Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen (2001b), FFI is any instructional movement which is used to raise students' attention to linguistic features. Focus on form in addressing grammatical points is mostly interactional and production-based tasks, that is, tasks that push learners to use their Interlanguage (IL) and produce more and more language which is a total shift from previous approaches based on input-based tasks such as immersion program and early version of communicative language teaching.

FFI is of two types; Implicit and explicit focus on form. Implicit focus on form has distinctive strategies in facing errors, among which recast, reformulation of either the whole part of learners' speech and elicitation are the most controversial ones (more information is provided in the following chapter, section: 2.6.4). Explicit focus on form: signaling quite directly the erroneous part, using metalanguage to indicate what is wrong; provide both correction and time span to practice them. The difference between implicit and explicit focus on form is not dichotomous type, but of continuum (Loewen, 2004; Poole, 2005; Nassaji, 2007). That is the continuum proposed by these researchers includes all those techniques, mostly beneficial for learners and at the same time this continuum maintains that there are degrees of implicitness and explicitness in the techniques utilized in the introduction of grammar in the ESL classroom. Implicit techniques are defined as those form-focused techniques that avoid the rule explanations and direct instructions to attend to particular language forms during instruction.

Lying in this realm the feedback strategies used to deal with students' errors are different with different level of effectiveness. The efficacy of various kinds of feedbacks is measured whether or not the utilization of a feedback strategy results in

uptake. Chaudron (1977) states that in order to consider a feedback effective, the learners' immediate correct utterance followed by the feedback need to be measured.

In this framework, uptake implies as any of L2 learners' immediate reaction to the teacher's provision of feedback strategies to draw the learner's attention, to erroneous forms of the student's initial utterance (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Uptake as mentioned is a term used to refer to the learners' responses immediately followed feedback where either an erroneous production or a query about linguistic form within the context of meaning-focused language activity occur (Loewen, 2004). Chaudron (1977) seems to be one of those who made the first reference to uptake regarding negative feedback or error correction.

1.2 Relationship between Corrective Feedback and Uptake

Providing feedback for students' utterances, mainly in the form of correction, is one of the teachers' main duties. But the question here is, whether learners notice these corrective moves (Spada & Lightbown, 2008), and either the corrective feedbacks assist learners to uptake the language, or influence the student output provided immediately after corrective feedbacks (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Depending on the types of errors, teachers and students' preferences are different, but a general agreement can be found over the value of corrective feedback of negotiation type, clarification request, confirmation check, elicitation than those feedbacks that simply provide correct form such as recast.

Elicitation is one of those feedback strategies which push learners to provide the correct form (Swain, 1985, 1993, 1995) as opposed to recast, by employing which, teachers simply provide the correct forms (Mackey & Philp, 1998; Oliver,

1995, 2000). While some teachers believe in a delayed form of corrective feedback that may push learners for self-correction (Van Lier, 1988; Lyster & Ranta, 1997), others believe in more direct and overt corrective feedback (Gass & Varonis, 1994) to avoid misunderstanding of learners in believing that structural errors are acceptable. To some other researchers like Ellis (1994) and Spada (1997), implicit focus on form, recast, bears more successful results. Recasts may be perplexing in that the learners cannot be sure whether teachers are attempting to provide a correct model or the other way of saying the same idea (Lyster, 1998a, 1998b).

Earlier in the literature, it is mentioned that corrective feedback strategies of any type tend to bear different rates of efficacy on L2 development. A rather detailed review of the studies mentioned so far disclose that reformulation strategies, like clarification requests and elicitation, have been cited to produce more effective results than those which do not, i. e., recasts (Lyster, 1998a, 1998b; Long, 2007). While in Doughty and Varela (1998) results indicate that in developing IL, recasts are beneficial. Normally, the integration of recasts and paralinguistic signals boosted the prominence of recasts and, accordingly, their impacts were further evident than had been revealed before. Compared to other different studies Lightbown and Spada (1990) and White (1991), it has further been proven that corrective feedbacks tend to be more effective along with other factors like metalinguistic clues.

Chaudron (1988), although, pinpoints the fact that for a desirable efficacy of corrective feedback, corrections must be clear and consistent with the types of errors. This view formed on the basis of Fanselow (1977) earlier comments on the provision of effective feedback through highlighting the error and providing the learners with explicit information. Chaudron (1988) accentuated that feedback which elicits learner production and self-correction is more probable to influence the learners'

ability positively in monitoring their own IL. In fact, a large number of previous researches on error treatment Allwright (1984) and Corder (2009) propose that "pushing" L2 learners in their "output" rather than simply providing them with the correct form. Swain et al. (1985) and Pica (1988) further share this opinion, that provision of self-repair opportunities and time clearly benefits L2 development, corrective techniques, like clarification requests, elicitation, and confirmation checks, that lead to modified output and self-repair seems more probable to improve learners' language.

1.3   Background of the Study

There is an old controversy over the issue of language structure, whether or not the grammar must be dealt with throughout the course of language instruction and whether it should be removed totally or to be replaced with meaning-focused exploitation of the target language (Kelly, 1969). The need for instructing linguistic features, namely grammar is again absorbing the attention of researchers, teachers, and syllabus designers interested in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). In an English as Second Language (ESL) context like Malaysia where English Language has a crucial role within the educational system of this country from the elementary level to the postgraduate studies, to tackle some of the existing problems of learning English, it is helpful to know about the educational system.

1.3.1   The Malaysian Education System

Education and society in Malaysia, as in any other country, are inherently linked. In the early nineteen century, the time of British colonizing over Malaysia,

one can find the trace of Britain on Malaysia's education system. This footprint can be categorized into two levels. First, under British legislation, a society of multi-ethnic [1]Malaya was developed, including Chinese and Indians (brought to the colony primarily as laborers) within the indigenous Malay society. Second, Malaysia's educational system follows that of Britain. Embarking upon the demands for equal rights among different ethnics, the Malaysian educational system tries to respond to this demand as well as catering for the needs of a rapidly developing economy Ministry of Education (MoE, 2009).[2]

Under the national education system, a child begins his/her education with pre-school education at the age of six and will be admitted into the first year of the 6-year compulsory primary education when the child reaches the age of seven on the first day of January of the current school year. The government provides 11 years of free primary and secondary education. After completing 11 years of free education, further education is no longer automatic, but is subject to the individual's academic performance and financial capability. These secondary school graduates (i.e. students with SPM[2] qualifications) can opt to continue their education in postsecondary schools to obtain a pre-university qualification (such as the Sixth Form or Matriculation program) or further their education at tertiary or higher educational institutions leading to the award of a certificate or diploma qualification (SEAMEO, 2012).

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[1]Malaya was the pre-independence [1957] term and Malaysia the post-independence one.

[2]The **SijilPelajaran Malaysia** (**SPM**), or the **Malaysian Certificate of Education**, is a national examination taken by all fifth-year secondary school students in Malaysia. It is set and examined by the Malaysian Examinations Syndicate (*LembagaPeperiksaan Malaysia*).

1.3.2   The English Language Curriculum

The English language curriculum is organized in a manner that reflects the way English is used in society in everyday life. Three areas of language use have been delineated and these are the interpersonal, the informational, and the aesthetic. The curriculum content of the syllabus outlines three main sections, namely, the learning outcomes to be achieved by learners, the language content to be incorporated into the lessons, and the educational emphases to be woven into materials and activities (MoE, 2003). These areas incorporate the integration of the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The language content outlines the grammar, the sound system and the word list to be taught, while the section on educational emphases incorporates worldwide developments in education such as thinking skills. In this section, grammar items have been selected from the list in the syllabus and these are to be taught within the context of the three areas of language use. In addition, sentence patterns have been listed to enable learners to master the structures of the English language (MoE, 2003).

It is recommended to teachers to focus only on a limited number of structures, each time and instead make sure that the learners understand and can apply these structures as well. The introduction of too many complex structures might be counterproductive when it involves weaker learners. Repletion, reinforcement, and consolidation lead to mastery of these grammatical structures. For language learners to master different skills of language, vocabulary, grammatical structures, and the phonetic system a lot of repetition must be included so that learners' attention is drawn to these elements. To achieve this aim, English teachers must set various sets of tasks and activities that will ensure learners apply the newly learnt language items frequently so that the items are transferred into long term

memory. Within this process of repetition, new materials play important role to avoid any possible boredom due to the plenty of exercises.

The lessons are based upon the common themes and topics, to make them more interesting for learners to learn the language more meaningfully. Knowledge from different subjects like Science and Geography can also be injected into the lessons or alternatively, topics can be drawn from current issues. Learners begin with some basic issues and concerns in their immediate surroundings, i. e. the school, town, country, and later they move up to topics and themes whereby they need a more sophisticated level of English language competence to perform. The learning outcomes of such situations, equip learners with a certain level of language ability to meet the demands of the real world by paying attention to the authentic language use in society. Comparatively, it can be achieved through incorporating the terms of the interpersonal, informational, and aesthetic use of language within the curriculum. It is also achieved by introducing authentic themes through classroom activities and group work. Anytime and anywhere that the opportunity arises, learners are encouraged to socialize in contexts outside of the classroom so that they learn to implement in real-life contexts.

To conclude, by the end of the Form 4, students should be able to

ꞁ Make conversations and talk about various topics with friends and with people whom they meet for the first time;

ꞁ Interact with people and develop skills in forming and maintaining friendships by expressing care and concerns and willingness to help, and creating a sense of togetherness;

) Give feedback on products and services and respond appropriately to feedback given;

) Read and respond to poems and stories;

) Obtain information from various sources, including factual material and present the information clearly and accurately to others both orally and in writing (MoE, 2003, 2009).

The Malaysian education system is influenced by the British education system. Going up through 11 years of free education, further academic pursuit is reliant on students' previous academic performance. English language is incorporated into this system in a way to enable the students to be communicatively competent in all four skills in real life context, after graduation. Clearly, English is taught in a communicative context in the Malaysian education system.

1.3.3   Higher Education in Malaysia

Within the past decades, a developmental trend has taken place in the Malaysian higher education system, which has already made malaysia an outstanding educational platform in the region. "Strategic Plan for Higher Education: Laying the Foundation Beyond 2020" outlines the measures and strategies that will make Malaysia an international center of educational excellence (MoE, 2012).

A general review of the number of higher education centers in this multi-ethnic country with about 27 million populations reveals that Malaysia is an educational excellence. Malaysia has 20 public universities, 37 private universities and four foreign university branch campuses; 485 private colleges, 22 polytechnics

and 37 public community colleges as in May 2011. These higher education institutions (HEI) offer a wide range of tertiary qualifications at an affordable cost. There are also various higher educational institutions from the United Kingdom, United States, Australia, Canada, France, Germany and New Zealand which offer twinning and '3+0' degree programs through partnerships with Malaysian colleges and universities. Four universities out of the 20 public universities (University of Malaya, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia and Universiti Kabangsaan Malaysia) in Malaysia have been assigned a research university status with additional funding for R&D and commercialization of research.

As a part of the Ninth Malaysian plan, Malaysia Ministry of higher education discerns only one university as Apex, and Universiti Sains Malaysia, has been granted as Apex University twice successively. All international students are welcomed by Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE, 2012). To pursue their educations at Malaysia's higher educational institutions, since the mid-1990s, international students have shown great enthusiasm to Malaysia. Consequently, today, Malaysia is the top 11th destination in the world for international education / student enrollment at tertiary level.

1.3.4 Medium of Instruction

Students are free to choose to study either at national schools where the medium of instruction is the national language, i.e. Malay language (Bahasa Melayu) or national type schools that use Chinese/Tamil as the medium of instruction; or they can choose to go to international schools whereby English is the medium of instruction. As a result, it is quite advantageous and at the same time common to see

Malaysian students possessing a good command of different languages besides their mother tongue and National language. This multi-lingual alongside the multi-ethnic educational context in Malaysia has truly made the nation an excellent center of education for pre-tertiary education.

1.3.4.1   Primary Level

All subjects in the national primary school are carried out in Bahasa Melayu (the national language) with English as a compulsory subject. On the other hand, in national type primary schools the medium of instruction is either Chinese or Tamil with both Bahasa Melayu and English taught as compulsory subjects. Since 2003, English language was the medium of instruction for Science and Mathematics in the entire primary schools. According to (MoE, 2009), in 8 July 2009, the teaching of science and mathematics will be reverted back to Bahasa Melayu, Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin announced. However, this will take effect from the onset of 2012.

1.3.5   Secondary Level

In secondary schools, Bahasa Melayu is used as the medium of instruction. English is taught as a second language in all schools. In all schools these two subjects are the main subjects and mandatory for every single student to learn. As extra subjects, Chinese, Tamil and Arabic (communication) are offered. English is

the medium of instruction for Science and Mathematics subjects but from 2012 onwards, these two subjects have been taught in Bahasa Melayu.

1.3.6 English in Malaysian Educational System

In 1989, the KBSM[3] syllabus was infused into the Malaysian educational system to improve students' reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills; advocating the communicative approach. Nonetheless, with all the interesting characteristics and approaches introduced in the syllabus, scholars within the field were still struggling with the state of public exam that has immensely affected the course of teaching. These two, namely examination and the syllabus; do not match each other. The examination relies mainly on writing and reading comprehension which is not in line with the teaching and learning approach required by the syllabus content (Ambigapathy, 2007). He mentions that;

> In 2000 the English syllabus experienced a wave of changes; the revised syllabus aimed to extend learners' English language proficiency in order to meet their needs to use English in everyday life, for knowledge acquisition and for future workplaces.
>
> (Ambigapathy, 2007, p. 29)

The KBSM syllabus with all its new features focuses more on the use of language in daily life and places importance on the effective use of language by the learners. Classroom practices must enable teachers and students to reflect upon the

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[3]KBSM (Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah: Integrated Curriculum for Secondary School) is to provide general education until the 11th year of schooling, through the offering of core subjects, and elective subjects to enable students to make choices in selecting subjects of their interest.

ways they do a task. Memorizing and repeating information that has been transmitted by the teacher should make way for knowledge producing communities (Kalantzis & Cope, 2005). Some of the views of the Malaysian teachers on the difficulty of teaching English (Ambigapathy, 2003; 2004 in Ambigapathy, 2007, p. 77) are mentioned below;

⌡The emphasis on tests and public examinations do not encourage effective learning in the English classroom.

⌡The main difficulties of teaching English include teaching methods, developing activities for listening and speaking, using grammar correctly and writing.

⌡Learning in school is too exam-oriented, little time and attention is given to meaningful learning.

A large number of Malaysian higher education institutions have declared that English would be used for the instruction of content subject classrooms. The driving force to push toward the implementation of a second language in teaching, or content and language integrated learning (CLIL) was supposed to enhance the local students' English language proficiency (Mahathir, 2003). Furthermore, a huge body of information, these days, is accessible in English. Therefore, it is believed that the opportunities to use English and more contact with the language, both in the classroom and in society can enhance the students' English language ability, which is the gateway to access a variety of information in a wide number of fields which will itself be facilitators of the acquisition of knowledge.

Despite English has been the medium of instruction, very little interest has been basically given to it. A mixed code of English and Bahasa Melayu (BM), the latter being the mother tongue of a large number of teachers and learners, is used extensively in most content-based lectures in the classrooms. That is to say some

subjects like History, Geography (MoE, 2009), for example, are taught in Bahasa Melayu and some other subjects such as Science, Math, Physics are taught in English. Grammar lessons here in this context are introduced through focus on form approach in the form of teacher-student interaction mostly. These grammar lessons are incorporated into speaking lessons.

1.3.7   Malaysian University English Test (MUET)

The Malaysian Examinations Council is responsible for the conducting of the Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (STPM) (Malaysia Higher School Certificate) examination effective since 1982. This examination replaced the Higher School Certificate (HSC) examination conducted by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate in collaboration with Universiti Malaya. With effect from 1999, the Malaysian Examinations Council is also responsible for the management of the Malaysian University English Test (MUET). MUET is conducted twice a year and is compulsory for students who intend to pursue first degree studies in local public universities. The inception of MUET in 1999 into the educational system was to make sure that MUET measures its pertinence in evaluating the proficiency of examinees' English language. There are four components in MUET: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The scores in MUET are graded in 6 bands, with Band 6 the highest and Band 1 the lowest. Students obtaining band 6 have very good command of the language and those who score band 5 have also good command of the language. The next band score is 4 at which the candidates level of English is satisfactory. In band 3 the candidates have moderate command of the English

language and in bands 2 and 1 the students are considered as limited users dues to the low level of English language proficiency.

1.3.8   English in Malaysia

A reasonable level of English literacy among Malaysian students even after 11 years of schooling seems unsatisfactory to some researchers (Naginder, 2006; Jalaluddin, Norsimah, & Kesumawati, 2008). A detailed review of some of the existing researches also unveils a common strand in Malaysian schools. The idea of a final exam and orientation towards it (Koo *et. al.,* 2012, p. 56) is prevalent throughout the education system. By taking into consideration that the national examination has been highly emphasized, it is reported that teachers try to pay more attention to the teaching of grammar which in turn the communicative aspects of language learning would be neglected in their teaching scheme. In order to pass the examinations, rote learning of skills seems advantageous where eventually communicative competence is poorly improved - thus brought up a new class of graduates who could pass the examinations and continue to the tertiary level without a proper authentic language competence or actually possessing the ability to utilize the English language productively in a communicative event (ibid). Moreover, a highly teacher-centered approach is practiced in the classroom and chalk-and-talk drill method (MoE, 2003). The most popular teaching method, sadly, is drilling using past-year examination questions, worksheets and exercise books (Ambigapathy, 2002).

According to Hazita (2009) a large number of school learners, particularly those who live in rural areas, encounter the least possible authentic contacts with

English language except their exposure to it during their English classes. In addition, a formal, structured course of English language learning during their eleven years of schooling, students reasonably acquire a conceptualized English literacy through school experience. The experience of English language learning in school, proven by some earlier researchers in the field, expresses English language learning as a process of mastering specific language skills such as writing, reading and grammar which is again for the sake of passing examinations successfully.

A greater priority is put on the teaching of reading and writing skills and the learning of grammatical structures. Then it is the school examinations as well as national ones that evaluate the mastery of these grammatical points (Razianna, 2005). Thereby, the teaching and learning of any subject mainly English is supposed to be the mastery of the mechanics of English language in a segmented form without making any proper connections to its authentic used in society. However, some of these grammatical structures are introduced to the learners through dialogues in which these forms are injected with the purpose of practicing the language functions taught in the classroom. Consequently, students will not be able to communicate orally, and this makes the issue even harder when one cannot apply already learnt material in real context. The process of English language learning is seen as the mastery of a set of language mechanics with "fixed" ways of using the language; segmented broken parts of language away from its communicative use. Language in this system is manifested as a neutral set of systems to be learned and mastered through instruction and drilling within specific classroom contexts.

Malaysia has recently prioritized the importance of English competence. Normazidah, Lie and Hazita (2012) proposed a review of the previously done studies that highlights the problem and the practice of both teaching and learning English