

A View Into Successful Teaching Techniques: Teaching Malay Language As A Foreign Language In Malaysia

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Abstract

This paper will highlight successful teaching techniques used in class in teaching the Malay Language 1 course in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). The course is to equip foreign students for their studies and also as means of basic communication with the locals in Malaysia. In Malaysia, the emphasis in Malay language teaching are focused to Malaysians and had been on grammar structure. There has been little development of teaching of Malay as a foreign language. However, the effort to introduce Malay as a foreign language is important since generally there are a growing number of learners who are aware of the benefits. Other than travelers guide and basic Malay phrase books, not many materials are found for teaching of Malay as a foreign language. Based on the lack of resources, teachers have to incorporate techniques to be used in class to teach the Malay language course. It is hoped that other foreign language teachers will find information useful especially in the teaching the Malay Language as a foreign language.

Keywords: Malay Language, foreign language, teaching technique

A. Introduction

The Malay language originates to the Austronesia region. During the 16th century, the Malay language has emerged as a language of knowledge, religion, law, diplomacy and also trade (Gani & Talib, 2009; Ostler, 2005). The Malay language is historically one of the most politically powerful languages of the enormous Austronesian language family. For centuries, Malay has served as a common language throughout Indonesia, Malaysia, Sumatra, Borneo, and the Malay Peninsula, promoting a free exchange of commerce and culture among these areas. The Malay language is a member of the Austronesian, or Malayo-Polynesian, language family. The Austronesian language family is one of the world's largest, with more than 1,200 distinct languages found from Madagascar to Hawaii. The Austronesian family can be further split into two primary groups, Central-Eastern and Western. Malay is a member of this Western branch, along with Indonesian, Javanese and Filipino. Most linguists agree that Malay has had the most significant political impact throughout the history of all Austronesian languages.

Garvin and Mathiot (1956 as cited by Gumperz (1993) defined standard language as “a codified form of language, accepted by and serving as a model to a larger speech community”. And that what precisely happened back then because the standard Malay language has become the identity and part and parcel of life in that era for reading, writing and speaking. Fortunately, the Malay language is still widely used until today and has been handed down from generations to generations. Although the language has gone through changes throughout the centuries, but the root of the language is still similar.

Presently, the Malay language has become one of the five most widely used languages in the world and serves as a national language for Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, and Singapore (although the latter uses English more dominantly in everyday life). Speakers of the Malay language are can also be found in South Thailand (which numbers up to a million people), Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Philippines and even outside South East Asia such as Sri Lanka, South Africa, Mecca, Australia, Holland, England and many more (Gani & Talib, 2009).

B. Malay Language in Malaysia

In Malaysia, the Malay language has been bestowed the national language status and also as the official language since 1957. The Malay language's position as the national language (Watson, 1980) has become one of the basis of the social contract signed between the Malays in Malaysia with the other races which was sealed in the National Language Act 1963/1967 which requires that Bahasa Malaysia be used for official purposes (Article 152). The Malay language has been identified as one of the building blocks of the country, especially in its role as a language of unity and prosperity and also as the official language of the country's administration and the official medium of instruction in the nation's education system.

C. Malay Language as a Foreign Language

With almost a million foreign workers in Malaysia, many foreign nationals such as from Thailand, Indonesia, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia and the Philippines are calling Malaysia home. However, in order to be part

of the Malaysian workforce, they have to undergo a compulsory Induction Course before or after coming to Malaysia said former Deputy Minister from the Ministry of Human Resources Datuk Abdul Rahman Bakar. The course includes communication skills in Malay and English, knowledge of common laws and also Malaysian culture ("Parliament: Foreign Workers", 2004). These foreign workers can be found almost everywhere in Malaysia and they can generally speak basic English and Malay but a large number of them, can speak fluent Malay with influences of their native language or mother tongue.

As for foreign students, it is also compulsory for them to learn the Malay Language. Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Khaled Nordin (Pearl, 2010) said that the government's idea of making it compulsory for foreign students to learn Malay language was more for the purpose of building good relations between the students and the locals. "This is to enable the foreign students to communicate better with the local community, for instance, when they go out or need to buy things at the shop."

D. Malay Language in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)

The country's aim of becoming a developing nation by the year 2020 (Mohamad, 1996) has encouraged USM to promote the Malay language to all students in the university. Passing the Malay language course which is offered at the School of Languages, Literacies and Translation (PPBLT) is one of the requirements for graduation. It all started in 1972, when PPBLT (which was known as Language Unit) offered the Malay language course as one of the major courses then and even now.

Initially, the Bahasa Malaysia I (Malay Language I) course was only offered to students who come from vernacular schools because they did not have basic Malay at the time. Then, it was opened to foreign academic staff who were working in USM. The course was subsequently offered to foreign students when USM opened its doors to them whether at the undergraduate or postgraduate level. Since then, the number of students taking up this course has been an encouraging as the intake keeps increasing from one semester to the next. Last academic session (2011/2012), the numbers of student increase to 450 for three campuses.

E. Syllabus

As in other language courses, the syllabus covers a wide area that is deemed suitable for beginners since many of the takers are foreign students. Even Indonesian students find it useful as they although their Indonesian language is almost similar in nature. The syllabus is designed in such a way that the input is gradually built upon as the learning progresses. It also infuses basic theories of behaviorism, cognitivism and humanism so that learning can be an active process in a conducive, non-threatening environment with a touch of stimulus, response and reinforcement. Stephen Krashen (1981) popularly pointed out that learning and acquiring a language are two different things altogether. Both processes actually complements each other and the Malay Language I tries to address this in its syllabus.

Some of the areas and topics touched upon are introduction to the Malay sound system, meeting and greeting, learn about numbers, time, money, introducing oneself and others. The students also learn about classifiers, family, calendar, daily activities,

locating objects and asking for modes of transport, direction, location, describing food, taste, weather and country. Classes and tutorials are conducted 4 hours per week (2 hours per class) and grades are given based on the in-class assessment (50%) and final exam (50%). The in-class assessment includes Oral Test and Writing Test.

F. Teaching Methods: Selection and Application

In the process of teaching and learning, teachers can pick and choose their preferred techniques of disseminating knowledge to the students, based on the students' abilities, resources available and support from the school or university and even the ministry. However, those techniques should be connected to the researches that have been done relating to the fields in education such as psychology, sociology, educational technology and so on.

Although various techniques or approaches are available for teachers to utilize, there is no single method that can fully exploit the student's potential. Teachers must be creative, selective and also elective in their teaching styles as one method may work in one class but it may not work in the other. This depends on many factors, such as age, students' ability, interest, peers, resources, surroundings and so on. Thus, a teacher should be wise and has a huge task of selecting the right method and technique suitable in his or her class, in order to achieve the objective set for each session and also to accomplish the desired results for the whole course and to attain the demands of the curriculum.

Having said that, the teaching and learning of Bahasa Malaysia I course offered at the School of Languages, Literacies and Translation, Universiti Sains Malaysia is also no exception. Various techniques have been tried and tested according to the suitability of the topics in order to derive the best ways in teaching the language to foreign students. Some of the techniques that the teachers have found useful and effective in class are drilling, language games, questioning and answering, and quizzes.

1. Drilling

This age old technique has been used for centuries in order to memorize facts and data which is then stored in our brain. It is also an activity of repeating information or skills that students have learned. The purpose of using this method in teaching the Malay language is to enhance the language skill learned as well as proficiency. Drilling is suitable in the teaching of Malay language because it can help students to master skills such as pronunciation of words and sentences or to memorize important facts offline or even online (Pufahl & Christian, 2001; Simon, 2008). Via this technique, students will go through the process of listening, watching and thinking of the meaning of the words as well as the accurate usage of words for daily situations.

The Malay spelling and pronunciation system contains the alphabet, the pure vowels, the diphthongs, the consonants, combination of two consonants such as ng, sy, gh, kh and ny. The students pronounce words such as *bapa, kayu, buku, suci, tua, dia* and others. The listening and uttering exercises used mimics the Audiolingual Method which is mainly used in second language learning. 5 aspects are stressed upon, which are;

- a) Pronunciation - to pronounce words correctly based on the syllables, which

also include the intonation for specific situations.

- b) Grammar - to correctly use the language with the understanding of all grammatical rules.
- c) Vocabulary - to widen their vocabulary with the correct usage of affixes and suffixes based on context and situation.
- d) Fluency - to use words or produce utterances spontaneously without thinking of the meanings.
- e) Comprehension - to understand questions and able to give appropriate answers.

However, it is undeniable that this technique has some flaws which include extensive memorization of words and grammatical rules. This technique also limits the freedom to think discourages creativity. However, this style of teaching is very useful and suitable for units that require enrichments, habit learning repetitions because the language structures are simply imitated and feedback is received from the teacher (Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Morgan & Neil, 2001). This habit learning theory is also related to Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching whereby simple grammatical forms were taught before complex ones in a three-step process, "first; the learner was to receive the knowledge, step two was to fix it in the memory through repetition and the last step was to practice it until it became a personal skill" (Gustavsson, 2008; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

2. Language Games

Language games are a particularly fun way of learning a language. Students' involvement in games can expose them to intensive training, meaningful learning and also as a diagnostic tool. Most of the activities require the students to use all the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Furthermore, conducting language games is in line with the needs of national educational system and National Educational Philosophy. This is because of the objectives that lie within the language games themselves, which are;

- a) To stimulate students' verbal interaction.
- b) To improve fluency and increase confidence.
- c) To prepare the learning contexts.
- d) To act as a tool to alleviate boredom.
- e) To act as a tool for correction and enrichment.

Language games are particularly good at improving the communication skills between all of students in class especially in USM where students come from all four corners of the world. With such cooperation in class, students work together to achieve certain goals. This emphasis on social interaction in learning situations is derived from Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky's idea that developing communicative competence can be obtained from cooperative learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

3. Questioning and Answering

This age old technique is still a favourite among teachers today in language education. This method was not chosen not because of its simplicity in execution but it

is very effective in creating teacher and student interaction. Teachers will ask questions pertaining to which units which have been learnt in class and students are expected to respond appropriately. The questions thrown to them requires them to think, and at the same time, will enable them to do self-testing and self-evaluation of what they have acquired.

The purpose of this 'question and answer' technique is to detect or identify how knowledgeable students are in the language, to encourage the students to think creatively, innovatively, logically and critically, and to encourage students to arrange and explain the information that has been taught to them. It is also useful in determining student's comprehension or command over specific aspects of language (Cismas, 2008). Teachers must however plan the questions beforehand and ensure the quality of the questions before going to class as this would not only help them in conversing well in the language but also to sharpen their minds, which will lead to a more conducive learning environment. However, from the research we conduct, the feedback from students via the 'question and answer' technique was so interesting.

4. Quizzes

Quizzes were introduced in radios during the 1940's in England by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). So when the British ruled Malaya prior to independence in 1957, they have incorporated this type of exercises in many of the subjects in English medium British sponsored schools, but then, the Malay schools followed suit.

The objectives of this technique (Shuib, 2008) are basically to strengthen the teaching of teachers and also students' understanding of topics. Furthermore it would also enable students to revise in a more interesting manner because the riddle-type questions let them think outside the box and forget their worries, thus teaching the learners that they can think in a different way. Apart from that, the students will also understand the basic concepts of the Malay language system, in terms of meaning and correct usage of the language.

There are two styles of teaching and learning via this technique. The first style is to conduct it spontaneously at every stage of their learning time, which is the initial stage, developmental stage and closing stage. This means that quizzes can be in a form of stimulus, response, enrichment and reinforcement. Another style is to treat it like a competition and the contest is between the students themselves.

G. Effectiveness of Techniques

All in all, a well-structured curriculum and syllabus is required to achieve the desired results (Omar & Hamzah, 2009). Within one semester, students who take up the course can speak basic Malay language and practising it outside the classroom in not a problem as all Malaysian students can speak Malay. This is obviously an advantage for the students as they can apply what they have learnt in class and use it in real-life situations. A focus group interview was conducted among teachers (N=7) who have taught this course and students (N=20) who have completed the course. These randomly selected samples were questioned in order to learn about the effectiveness of this programme. Below are the findings which have divided into Involvement, Satisfaction, Tasks and Performance in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1: Findings from the Students

Involvement	Satisfaction	Tasks	Performance
Able to participate actively in class	Able to introduce oneself and family in Malay	Exercises given helps in understanding the language	Oral test – able to speak basic Malay after the end of the course
Able to get along with other students	Able to ask simple questions i.e. directions to a place	Teacher always gives extra exercises after each lesson	Written test – able to answer questions just like the way the teachers taught
Able to get along with other students	Able to use Malay when buying things	Teacher always gives extra exercises after each lesson Lessons are fun which builds our confidence	

In general, students are satisfied with the whole course because they can not only converse in basic Malay but also able to answer the test and exam questions well thanks to the innovative teachers and also the well-thought out syllabus.

Table 2: Findings from the Teachers

Involvement	Satisfaction	Tasks	Performance
Students always give excellent cooperation.	Students are able to use and apply what they have learnt very well.	Students find the tasks helpful and are very diligent in finishing their work.	Oral test – students are able to answer questions and understand the instructions given.
Students are active in participating in class.	Students can answer questions that were asked.	Extra exercises and assignments are finished on time.	Written test – at the end of the course, students are able to write a short essay (about 80-100 words)
	Students can ask questions in Malay.	Activities conducted are always interesting and fun to the students.	

Based on Table 2, teachers are also generally pleased by the performance of the students as they do well in tests and exams. This shows that their teaching techniques are suitable for foreign students who are studying in USM as they can understand and cope with the lesson.

Besides success in the Malay Language 1 course, the activities are also incorporated in the short-term courses organized by the School of Languages, Literacies and Translation especially in the Malay Language and Culture Programme, whereby overseas students (from Japan, Korea, Germany and Thailand for example) would come to Malaysia for one to four months to immerse themselves in the Malay language and culture. Formal classes are held daily while cultures are introduced through activities and visits. They are accompanied by the Malay speaking buddies all the time. There's even a homestay programme whereby students would live with a traditional Malay family, experiencing authentic Malay customs and practicing their Malay language as well.

H. Conclusion

The use of various techniques is important for any teacher in the process of teaching and learning. The teachers have successfully imparted the required knowledge and demands of the curriculum and the students have reaped great rewards as they are able to converse in the Malay language. Choosing the right technique must be done by analyzing factors such as, students' age, background, ability, mental capability and objectives of the lessons. However, each technique does have its limitations and they must be chosen carefully as they will not be applicable in all situations and classroom conditions. Whatever the technique is, whether student-centered or teacher-centered must be fun and benefits the students. Since this paper serves only as an overview of what has been done in class and perceptions of teachers towards teaching techniques, a more in-depth study should be conducted among students to determine its true effectiveness.

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