

## L1 Interference in L2 Writing: A Study on Year 3 BTESL Students

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### Abstract

*This study attempts to identify the interferences of L1 in L2 writing among final year Malay students taking Bachelor in Teaching English as Second Language (TESL) in a Higher Education Institute in Shah Alam, Malaysia. 73 bilingual Malay students who are in their final year of study participated in this study. Data collection tool included two instruments; 1) a questionnaire in which the participants were asked regarding their perception on the interference of their L1 in their L2 writing, as well as 2) written discourse in the form of descriptive essays. The participants were provided with a text in Malay language to be convert into the second language within 30 minutes. Then, the errors were classified into six (6) categories according to the prepared rubric to find out the impact of L1 interferences in L2 writing. The findings of this study have shown that the biggest impact of first language interference can be seen in the writing is grammar, word choice, spelling, punctuation and content, whereas no evidence of error in capitalization. Yet, the negative impact on the transfer of L1 to writing in L2 were likely committed because of the non-existence of a certain rule or concept in the L1 of the participants. Besides, students' perceptions on the interference of L1 in L2 writing have shown that they are not aware of the inadequate knowledge of English language that may have led them to do these kinds of errors.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background

Language is the most essential human possession to communicate and exchange ideas, feelings, emotions and information with people who use both speaking and writing. Language plays a significant role in the interaction between everyday life. In Malaysia, Malay is used as an official language in which

the use of Malay is a must on an official occasion related to the government. However, in today's global era, English is used as a medium of communication for varieties purposes such as studies, business, tourism, political, and international relationship. Therefore, the English language became a compulsory subject in school in order to produce bilingual citizens. Writing is a complex process in all its different forms and purposes. L1 interference is where a speaker uses language forms and structures from their first language in a language they are learning. One of the main barriers to second language acquisition is mother tongue or L1 interference, especially in productive writing skills. This study seeks to identify the impact of L1 on students' writing in English. There have been many extensive types of research have been conducted to study first language interference and its effect on second-language learners. According to Jie (2008), mother tongue interference affects L2 learning as 'language' is regarded as a set of new habits while 'learning' is regarded as the establishment of habits.

Early research in language transfer can be traced back to the 1940s and 1950s, where the field of linguistics was strongly influenced by behaviourism. Behaviourism theory perceived learning as a process of habit formation. Transfer from the mother tongue was considered to be an influence of L1 habits on learning L2. According to Fries (1945), one of the leading behaviours, argued that interference with L1 is a major problem for second-language learners. As for Dulay et al (1982), interference is defined as the automatic transfer of the surface structure of the first language to the target language surface due to habit. Next, based on Ellis's (1997) perception, he refers to interference as 'transfer,' which he says is 'the influence exerted by the L1 learner on the L2 acquisition. He argues that the transfer depends on the learners' perception of what can be transferred and their stage of development in L2 learning. Ellis (1997) also raises the need to differentiate between errors and mistakes and makes a significant difference between them. He says that errors reflect gaps in the knowledge of the learner, as the learner does not know what is right. Mistakes reflect occasional performance deficiencies because the learner cannot perform what he or she knows in a particular instance.

### 1.2.Problem Statement

Writing is known to be one of the effective ways to convey thoughts and feelings by written languages, whether if it is in Malay language or English language. Management and Science University is one of the institutions in Malaysia which uses English as its medium of instruction during class. The Management and Science University students have a homogenous first language which is Malay and background in education language whereby they practice the Malay language since they were young and they were used to the environment where people around them used the Malay language as well. However, although all of them had undergone 11 years of formal education where English is taught as a compulsory subject during primary and secondary school but the length of exposure to English is not reflected by the students in their level of competence in English writing. Indeed, there are now a number of English university students who have limited vocabulary, lack systematic grammar and are unable to use their English knowledge as a result of mother tongue transfers can easily influence them. Thus, this research proposal aims to identify the impact of L1 interference on BTEFL students' writing in L2.

### 1.3.Objectives

The objectives of this research are: 1) To identify the students' perceptions on the interference of L1 on students' writing in L2. 2) To find out the impact of L1 interference on students' writing in L2 by translating a passage in L1 into L2.

### 1.4.Significance of Research

This study is designed to get a clearer understanding of the impact of students' L1 interference in L2 writing. It may provide the Ministry of Education with insights into language use may affect the students learning process. It may help them to improve the education standards by modifying or change the system in order to provide a systematic and effective learning process for the students as well as teaching process for the teachers and lecturers. Then, as for school, it may help them to get a better solution to

overcome this kind of issues in the classroom. It is to understand on what works and why, what the short and long-term consequences, provide the rationale and justification of decisions and actions. It is also to help to deal with the unexpected, identify issues, inform improvement and many more. Next, it may provide teachers and lecturers with insights to help them improve their quality of teaching that will address the various syntactic errors in writing among their students.

According to Heidari and Tahriri (2015), they emphasize that teachers were considered as responsible in the achievement of the students although in the era of 21st century learning, students-centered learning and communication approach are more in the spotlight. Besides, it can also be an eye-opener for the students to realize and spot the mistakes that they may have done in English writing. Based on the findings regarding the impact of L1 interference, it may help them to make a better decision to use English language wisely in order to improve their English writing as well as usage of English. It is also to help the students to learn by their mistakes by not repeating the same mistakes again in their English writing. Lastly, as for the future researchers in the same field, this study can be as the basis or reference for their study. Thus, it can be a validation for their future studies.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1.L1 Interference**

As mentioned in the background, early research into language transfer can be found in 1940s and 1950s, where behaviourism had a strong influence on the field of linguistics. The theory of behaviour perceived learning as a habit-formation process. The transfer of the mother tongue was regarded as the influence of L1 habit on L2. According to Fries (1945), one of the most important behaviours is that L1 interference is a major issue for learners of second language. In the early 1970s, some researchers began to pay attention to the second language writing process from the written text. They found the writing process in the second language is similar to the writing process in the first language. In addition, certain written features such as planning, revision (Cumming, 1989) and editing can be transferred from writing of the first language to the writing of second language.

An extensive research has already been carried out on first language interference in the target language. According to, Dulay and Burt (1982) they define interference as the automatic transfer of the first language's surface structure to the surface of the target language as a result of habit. Lott (1983: 256) defines interference as 'mistakes in learner's use of foreign language that can be traced back to the mother tongue '. While, Ellis (1997:51) refers to interference as a transfer, which he says is 'the influence of the L1 of the learner on the acquisition of a L2.' He argues that transfer is guided by the perceptions of learners about what can be transferred and their developmental stage in L2 learning. Selinker, (1972), Seligar, (1988) and Ellis (1997) agrees that when learning a target language, students draw up their own interim rules by using their L1 knowledge, but only if they believe that it will help them with the task of learning or if they have become sufficiently skilled in L2 to be able to transfer.

Researchers believed that students tend to rely on their first language structure when they would like to write or speak in the target language. If the structures are different, there are many errors in L1 so that first language interference in the second language is indicated (Decherts & Dllis, as cited in Bhela, 1999, p.22). A learner has problems in second language such as phonology, vocabulary and grammar due to interference in L2 and L2 habits (Beardsmore, 1982). In addition, Dulat et al. (1982) showed that the acquisition of second language differs from the acquisition of first language, but L1 and L2 students' errors are very similar. Where Selinker (1983) points out that in learning a second language, there are two types of transfer, which is positive and negative. As for positive transfer, L1 facilitates the acquisition of second language, but as for negative transfer, the first language has a negative impact on L2 and interferes in L1.

Based on one of the researches conducted in Malaysia by Mahendran Maniam (2010), 3.1% of the students involved in the research tend to use the Malay language whenever their vocabulary command

in L2 is weak. As claimed by the students, these words were used when they have used up their limited vocabulary and the use of the national language was therefore used. Mohideen (1996) also agrees that mother tongue interference is one of the major causes of writing errors among Malaysian students. He stated that syntax, grammar, lexis and pronunciation interfere with mother tongue. Most English teachers in Malaysia are very familiar with inaccurate structures that have a strongly influence of Bahasa Melayu such as using “although” and “but” in the phrase. Apart from that, according to Maros, Kim and Salehuddin (2007) the omission and use of incorrect forms are the two most common types of errors in all categories. Although not all errors are due to the interference in the mother tongue, but the 7 interference of the mother tongue was reflected in a large number of errors identified in the use of determiners, subject verb agreement and the copula “be”.

Another study conducted in Malaysia by Ab Manan et al (2017), the researchers prove that due to the absence of ‘be’ verb and ‘article’ in Malay language, students tend to drop the necessary ‘be’ verbs or articles yet to add unnecessary ones to their writing. Besides, the students also committed errors related to the use of adjective because an adjective usually comes before noun in Malay, while it is the other way around in English language. In addition, this research in line with the Centeno-Corte’s and Jimenez Jimenez (2004) research, which found that the use of L1 decreases while L2 proficiency is increasing. However, their results show that advanced L2 speakers reverted to L1 when “the problem became too difficult” (p.31). Based on the research by Van Weijen et al.(2009), the result shows that most of the writers tend to use L1 while writing in L2 to some extent. Thus, the L2 proficiency was shown to have no influence on the writing process and are linked only directly to L2 text quality.

The general writing proficiency has a negative influence on L1 use in the writing of L2 and a positive effect on L2 in the writing of L2. Last but not least, according to the researcher Debreli and Oyman (2016) who did study on the students’ preferences on the use of mother tongue in English classroom, they revealed that most of the students chose L1 to be used in the English classroom, same goes to other researchers’ finding (Ujmovic, 2007; Schweers, 1999; Tang, 2002). Low proficiency students are more complex in understanding L2 and need more support through L1. The study also showed that the students’ previous experiences with English and their current level of English also influenced their perceptions toward the use of L1.

## 2.2.Theoretical Framework

Behaviourism theory is the earliest language learning theory proposed by J.B Watson in 1913. Some behaviourists such as Skinner, Pavlov, Thorndike have supported and believed in this theory, and behavioural theory of learning has also been profoundly developed. In the 1950s and 1960s, a theory called as the habit-formation theory became very popular which comes from the behaviourist psychology that was represent by B.F Skinner. Based on the behaviourists, they believe that language is considered to be a set of linguistic practices and language habits is formed by identifying and strengthening links between stimuli and responses. On the other hand, learning a second language means developing a new set of language habits. Thus, in the process of habits formation, imitation and practices play an important role because behaviourists maintain that imitation helps students identify the links between stimuli and responses, whilst practices strengthen associations and support students in forming new language habits. Since the second language learning process is seen as a habit process, the learner’s mother tongue will either facilitate or interfere with second language learning. It means that if the mother tongue and language target have the same language habits, positive transfer will take place and the process of language learning will be facilitated. However, when the mother tongue and the target language have a meaning but express it in different ways, the student will transfer the ways of expression in the mother tongue to the target language. This is known as negative transfer, and the transfers result by the learner’s mistakes.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

This study employs quantitative research method where it differs from qualitative research. The aim of which is to determine the students' perception on the interference of L1 on writing in L2. It also seeks to uncover the impact of transfer that occur during the writing process, which the result can be either negative or positive. Quantitative research method is an attempt to collect data using objective methods to provide information regarding relations, comparisons and predictions and to remove the investigation from the investigation (Smith, 1983). According to Ann L Casebeer and Marja J Verhoef (1997), quantitative research is defined as "the numerical representation and manipulation of observations for the purpose of describing and explaining the phenomena that those observations reflect." In addition to that, Palomba and Banta (1999) also mentioned that it is distinguished by an emphasis on numbers, measurement, experimental design, and statistical analysis.

#### **3.2. Sampling Methods**

This research was conducted at a Higher Educational institute in Shah Alam, Malaysia, aiming to study the extent to which L1 interference impact on students' L2 writing in English. 73 students of Bachelor in English as Second Language (TESL) from that Higher Education institute in Shah Alam, were involved in answering the questionnaire. Meanwhile, 40 of them were randomly chosen to participate in the writing test. In conjunction with the aim of this research, all of the students involved are Malay and most of the students have a homogenous first language which is Malay and background in education.

#### **3.3. Instruments**

The instruments utilized in this research is quantitative method. The quantitative method adopted in this research include questionnaires and writing test. The purpose of their English writings is to identify, analyse and describe the problems caused by L1's transfer.

##### **3.3.1. Questionnaire**

For the purpose of this research, the survey by Sağlamel, H., & Kayaoğlu, M. N. (2015) has been adapted. The questionnaire consists of 21 items pertaining to the perception of students in English writing. It has been administered using 'Google form' and distributed to the participants. This questionnaire aims to identify the type of cognition that occurs in the thinking of the students prior to the writing process.

##### **3.3.2. Writing test**

In order to see the main problems that result from L1 interference, the writing test requires the participants to translate a short passage in L1 (Bahasa Malaysia) to transfer into L2 (English) is used to test the subjects' language skills. In addition, the language performance of their writings is also reflected. The writing test has been assessed according to the prepared rubrics and errors in the outputs were analysed, described and interpreted in light of the objectives of the current research.

#### **3.4. Data Collection Procedures**

The participants of this research were given a task where they need to translate a short passage that was written in L1 to transfer it into L2, the target language. The students were asked to finish the task within 30 minutes. In addition, the entire test was conducted in a normal class and the students could undertake the task without any pressure. The sample collected can therefore generally reflect the spontaneous use of the language. Finally, 40 written tests have been handed in. Following the written test, the questionnaire regarding the students' perception on the L1 interference has been distributed through a survey administration app 'Google form' to the participants, including those who have sit for the test.



### 3.5. Data Analysis Procedures

The compositions of the writing were collected at the beginning. Then, the writing has been assessed according to the prepared rubrics. Next, the errors in the writing test has been detected and then the identified errors have been analysed to examine the hypothesis. responses as well as to know the result whether it gives positive or negative impact toward their writing. As for the survey results, it has been used to confirm the results of the writings, such as written problems, the reasons they use the mother tongue and the difficulties they have encountered. A thematic analysis has been carried out to achieve the purpose of this analysis. After analyzing the writing test results as well as the participants' responses to the survey, findings are demonstrated in tables and charts in order to clearly describe and analyze the data.

## 4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

### 4.1. The Students' Perception of L1 Interference

Table 4.1.1: Feelings towards L2 writing.

	YES (%)	No (%)
1. I do not enjoy writing in English because it is a very difficult skill for me.	91.8	8.2
2. I enjoy writing in English.	87.7	12.3
3. I hate writing in English because I had some bad experience in the past.	94.5	5.5

Table 4.1.1 above shows that 91.8% percent of students stated that they do not enjoy writing in English whereas 87.7% of them do enjoy writing in English. It is also to be agreed by most of the students that due to bad experience in the past, the students tend to face lack of enjoyment in writing tasks. The students' tendency to write was not sufficiently nurtured.

Table 4.1.2: Writing in university.

	YES (%)	No (%)
4. Writing is something I only do in university.	65.8	34.2
5. I do not feel comfortable during a writing activity.	19.2	80.8
6. Writing is something I only anticipate doing for writing course.	42.5	57.5

In addition, writing tasks are considered to have little use in real life. Table 4.1.2 shows that students who are not comfortable in writing and who see writing as a university task or writing course can best demonstrate little value in real life. Academic writing is an important aspect for their current and future life because as ESL students, academic writing skills are required for their graduate studies.

Table 4.1.3: Beliefs about L2 writing.

	YES (%)	No (%)
7. I feel that I can be a good writer if I practice writing regularly.	94.5	5.5
8. I prefer to work with the lecturer during a writing activity.	52.1	47.9
9. I can write better when I work with other students.	60.3	39.7
10. I prefer to look at a writing model before I start writing in English.	71.2	28.8
11. People who are good at grammar will have no trouble in writing.	74	26

Based on table 4.1.3 above, a large number of students agreed on the idea that if they practice adequately, they will improve their writing. In order to produce better writing, 71.2% of the students usually refer to a writing model. It is to be said that when supported by a model, they are able to write better than usual. Most of the students stated that their preference to produce a good piece of writing are by working with peers and lecturer.

Table 4.1.4: Beliefs about L1 and L2 writing proficiency

	YES (%)	No (%)
12. I like to write in English because I am a good writer in Malay as well.	54.8	45.2
13. I am not a good writer in both Malay and English.	28.8	71.2
14. I think the writing traditions in Malay and English are quite different.	80.8	19.2
15. I do not think I am equipped with English writing conventions.	26	74
16. Only the native speakers can write efficiently in English.	83.6	16.4
17. In terms of writing style, English and Malay are similar.	41.1	58.9

Table 4.1.4 above shows some discrepancy in the responses of the participants. However, item 12 in comparing the students' L1 writing and L2 writing perceptions and behaviour, shows that 54.8% of the students believe that their English fluency is supported by their L1 writing proficiency. It seems that L1 interference is assumed to facilitate the L2 writing proficiency.

Table 4.1.5: Way of thinking in L2 writing.

	YES (%)	No (%)
18. I think in Malay and then write in English.	35.6	64.4
19. I think in English without thinking in Malay.	61.6	38.4
20. I will think one word by one word in Malay and then write in English,	17.8	82.2
21. I will think as a whole sentence in English and write in English.	90.4	9.6

Table 4.1.5 above was to assess the students' perception in the writing of L2 and the type of cognition occurred in the brain of the students prior to their writing. The results show that the students were not thinking and visualizing things in their first language before they began writing in L2. Due to this type of perception and thinking, the first language is perceived to be not the biggest concern towards the syntax in the L2 writing.

## 4.2. The Impact of L1 Interference in L2 Writing

Figure 4.2: The Impact of L1 Interference in L2 Writing

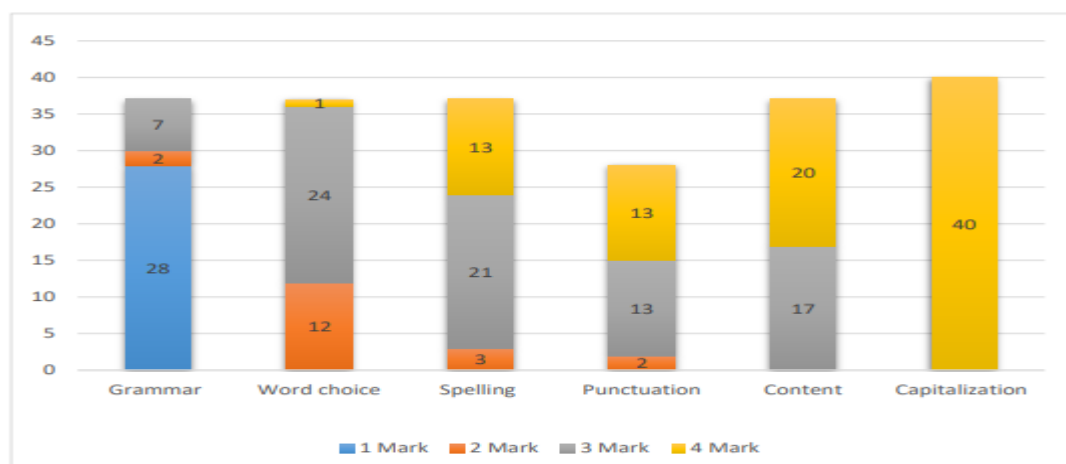


Figure 1: Writing Test Results

As shown in the graph above, it is apparent that the first language interference occurred in written test of these Malay students. Many linguistic elements have been negatively transferred which can be seen

in the written test. Based on the graph above, it shows that mainly five linguistic items were negatively transferred. The arrangement is according to the highest errors to the least errors occurred in the writing, namely, 1) Grammar 2) Word choice 3) Spelling 4) Punctuation 5) Content. Surprisingly, zero error in capitalization was found in the answers of the participants. Hence the following discussion will cover only the other five (5) areas of errors, where evidences were present.

#### 4.2.1. Grammar

Table 4.2.1 Examples of missing verbs to 'be'

The excerpts	The correct form
1. There also a few people jogging.	There were also a few people jogging.
2. Ahmad and his parents wearing a sport shoes for jogging at the park.	Ahmad and his parents were wearing a sport shoes for jogging at the park.
3. He saw a girl that drowning.	He saw a girl that was drowning.
4. Ahmad walking at the beach.	Ahmad was walking at the beach.
5. That morning still dark.	That morning was still dark
6. Ahmad very good with swimming and went save the little girl.	Ahmad was very good with swimming and went to save the little girl.

Table 4.2.1 shows examples of missing verbs to 'be' that were extracted from the written samples of the students. A total of 28 participants out of 40 made grammar error. These participants obtain 1 mark due to more than four errors in grammar in the writing. One of the most frequent occurred grammar errors in the written test were missing verb to 'Be'. It is because the 'be' verbs do not exist in Malay language. In conjunction to that the participants may see the 'be' verbs as unnecessary which they tend to drop 'be' verbs from their sentences.

Table 4.2.1 Examples of tenses errors

The excerpts	The correct form
1. It is still dawn and dark.	It was still dawn and dark.
There is a group of old people doing Taichi.	There were a group of old people doing Tai-chi
3. Ahmad is strolling at the beach side.	Ahmad was strolling at the beach.
4. Ahmad hears a voice asking for help	. Ahmad heard a voice asking for help.
5. He runs quickly to the girl.	He ran quickly to the girl.
6. He pulls the girl to the shore.	He pulled the girl to the shore.

Table 4.2.1 shows examples of tenses error that were extracted from the written samples of the students. The most frequent grammar error that occurred in writing was tenses error. Due to non-existed tenses in Malay language, the participants were unable to differentiate between the present tense and past tense in Malay language. In Malay language, the 'be' verbs of past tense do not exist to be added in each sentence to show that it had already happened. Instead, Malay language use certain words to indicate that it had already happened in the past. For instance, the translated version of excerpt 1 was worded as "Pada pagi itu masih gelap." The word "itu" is to show that it had already happened in that particular morning. Therefore, the readers should recognize that the content should be written in past tense and not in the present tense.

#### 4.2.2. Word choice

Table 4.2.2 Example of word choice

The excerpts	The correct form
1. The condition in the morning.	Keadaan pada pagi itu.
2. Ahmad was strolling at the beach.	Ahmad berjalan-jalan di tepi pantai.



Table 4.2.2 shows example of word choice that were extracted from the written samples of the students. Followed by the word choice use to describe the story, 12 participants gained 2 marks and 24 participants gained 3 marks for their test. As for ESL students, it shows that these participants have limited vocabulary and descriptive words in English language to be used in the writing. Based on the excerpts in the table shown, most of the participants used the word ‘condition’ to describe the day. However, the word ‘condition’ is more suitable to describe items instead of the day and weather. Other than that, the translated version of excerpt 2 was worded as “Ahmad berjalan-jalan di tepi pantai.” Most students used the word ‘beach’ instead of ‘seashore’ to indicate the edge of the sea. The most accurate and suitable word to describe “tepi pantai” is seashore because it is more specific and to be define as the land along the edge of the sea. Meanwhile, beach is a general term where it is known as an area of sand.

### **4.2.3. Spelling**

The table 4.2.3 Example of spelling errors

The excerpts	The correct form
1. He saw a little girl who was almost drawn.	He saw a little girl who was almost drown.
2. He jumped into the sea to safe the girl.	He jumped into the sea to save the girl.

The table 4.2.3 shows example of spelling errors that were extracted from the written samples of the students. Then, spelling was the third highest errors in English writing which 3 of the participants gained 2 marks and 21 participants gained 3 marks. In Malay language, a word can have different meanings depending on the context and how the message wanted to be delivered. For instance, as shown in the table above the translated version of excerpt 1 was worded as “Dia ternampak seorang budak perempuan yang hampir lemas.” The participant translated the word “lemas” into drawn, whereas the correct translation of “lemas” is drown. It happened due to the same pronunciation of both words but each interpret different meaning. Similar to the excerpt 2, the participant was confused between the word safe and save.

### **4.2.4. Punctuation**

The table 4.2.4 Example of punctuation errors

The excerpts	The correct form
1. She is the little girl mother.	She was the little girl’s mother.
2. She thanked Ahmad because he save her daughter life.	She thanked Ahmad because he saved her daughter’s life.

The table 4.2.4 shows example of punctuation errors that were extracted from the written samples of the students. Next is punctuation error, 2 participants gained 2 marks and 13 participants gained 3 marks for their writing. As shown in the table above, the correct form to show possession with a singular noun is to add an apostrophe plus the letter s such as girl’s. Therefore, the error occurred due to the different rules between Malay language and English language. In Malay language, it does not have certain form to show possession of someone. For instance, the translated version of excerpt 1 was “dia ialah ibu budak perempuan itu.” However, English language punctuation rules are important to show possession of someone. It is necessary to be written with apostrophe plus the letter s to indicate it belong to someone.

### **4.2.5. Content**

The table 4.2.5 Example of content writing

The excerpts	The correct form
1. Ahmad and her mom wore sport shoes to jog in the park.	Ahmad dan ibu bapanya memakai kasut sukan untuk pergi berjoging ke taman.
2. Ahmad knows how to swim and thought of swimming.	Ahmad pandai berenang dan dia terus berenang untuk menyelamatkan budak perempuan itu.
3. A woman approaches Ahmad to ask for help.	Seorang wanita menuju kearah Ahmad untuk memberi pertolongan.

The table 4.2.5 shows example of content that were extracted from the written samples of the students. Moreover, most of the participants able to convert the passage into English language well because they are able to comprehend the passage and interpret it in the correct manner. The total of 20 participants were able to obtain 4 marks for their writing test. Meanwhile, 17 of them gained 3 marks because the interpretation of the sentences is not same meaning as in the text or does not reach the fulfilment.

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1. The Impact on the Transfer of L1 to Writing in L2

Naturally, the first language has immediate access to their target language written performances. Nation (2003:1) suggests that in target language communication, the native language plays a small role. Moreover, the findings of this study revealed that the first language played a significant role throughout the writing process. To be more specific, grammar is the highest errors that were frequently made by the ESL students. The interferences mostly occur in 'be' verbs in which most students omitted the verbs to 'be' when they constructed their sentences. It is because in Malay language the 'be' verbs do not exist, therefore, due to this reason, many students consider 'be' verbs as unnecessary and have the tendency to drop 'be' verbs from their sentences (Nor Ashikin Ab Manan, 2017). Then, in writing English paragraph, the choice of tenses is crucial. It is because every English tense have their purposes whereby the present tense is used to describe general truth or daily activities that occur every day.

However, in Malay language the usage of tenses is seen less crucial and limited, so the students unable to differentiate well on the present and past tenses in Malay language as the words used can be ambiguous. In this context, Jalaluddin, Mat Awal and Abu Bakar (2008) pointed out that the morphological and syntactic differences between Malay language and English are illustrated as one of the major factors that make it difficult for students to master English. Cai (1993) also agreed that grammatical errors in writing and incorrect presentation of ideas resulted from the differences of rules. Other than that, Embi and Mohd Amin (2010) explained that having a wide range of vocabulary is essential for foreign language learners as it helps them communicate in the target language effectively. As stated in the table 4.2.2, having limited range of English vocabulary had cause the students to face difficulties in conveying the accurate message. This finding confirms the finding of the previous study, which claims that one of the biggest difficulties for ESL learners is a limited vocabulary for the English language (Mohamad Nor, Mazlan and Rajab, 2015).

According to Stapa, Abu Bakar and Abdul Latiff (2007), in addition to writing skills that are affected by a limited range of vocabulary, they also claimed that having deficient range of vocabulary leads to poor written literacy as students face problems in detail and ideas cohesion. Due to the inaccuracy of the language used in their written task, the meaning is hardly conveyed. ESL learners are often found to understand the target language's rules and structures, as they have been studying for English for several years. However, they have encountered the complexity of use and have unsuccessfully applied those rules and structures in producing texts that lead to errors being committed. Similar to the reason behind the errors for grammar, it can also be applied to spelling, punctuation and content errors. In many ways, Malay language differs from English, which often leads to a lack of skills in both languages,

especially for second and foreign language learners. These errors occurred because of the confusion between Malay language and English language rules.

### **5.2. Students' Perception on the Interference of L1 in L2 Writing**

Ellis (2008) suggests that language learners have different attitudes toward a target language and the attitude of learners has influenced the level of achievement in target language learning. Based on the given answers from the questionnaire, it can be concluded that the students depend less heavily on their first language in L2 writing. However, the BTESL students do not aware of the negative interference of L1 in L2 writing. These may have happened due to lack of consideration of inadequate English knowledge. Even though, the native speaker itself make grammar error whether in their speech or writing. As for second language learner, it is undeniably that these students' L1 will negatively interfere their second language learning.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This study has been designed to cater for Malay university students who are taking Bachelor in TESL in Malaysia. The language background differs, in the sense where they have to learn English language as a compulsory subject in school back then. It is to be notice that any second language learning process is accompanied by some challenges. In mastering second languages, the phenomenon of interference is an avoidable fact. The results of this study suggest the evidences of first language interference. In addition to other research on interference of first language, it can be said in brief that interference of the first language in second language in almost every aspect. The biggest impact of first language interference can be seen in the writing is grammar, word choice, spelling, punctuation and content. It can be concluded that the negative impact on the transfer of L1 to writing in L2 were likely committed because of the non-existence of a certain rule or concept in the L1 of the participants. Then, the results of students' perceptions on the interference of L1 in L2 writing show that they do not aware of the inadequate knowledge of English language that may have led them to do these kinds of errors.

### **6.1. Limitations**

There a few limitations of this study that has been discovered and these limitations affect the accuracy of the research collected. The study was conducted in a university in Shah Alam which participated by third year bachelor in TESL Malay students to identify the impact of their first language interference towards the second language writing. Initially, the targeted students to participate in this study should be consist of 100 Malay students overall. Due to many competitions at the same time, this study only managed to obtain 73 Malay students. Although, the written test able to achieve the targeted number of respondents. However, it seems that most students were not giving their cooperation in answering the questionnaires. Therefore, it is limited in scope to investigate the first language interferences on L2 and obtain a solid result of the interferences. Based on the results, it shows that the students answered it carelessly and only do it for the sake of answering it. Both research questions are meant to be supporting one another in order to achieve the purpose of this study. Somehow, it might reveal unreliable results and the expectation does not reach as what has been expected. Apart from that, the time period to carry out this study was not sufficient enough. It is because the research was conducted in less than 6 months' time. In order to get a reliable result and beneficial research, it should have been done in a longer time period or adequate time to conduct the research. Within the time frame given, it has affected the result of this research and the reliability of this study. This study could have been done in a better and proper manner to get a strong proof regarding the impact of the L1 interferences on L2 writing.

### **6.2. Suggestions**

This study examined the interference of first language in L2 writing, which was conducted with a written corpus and questionnaires. In line with the limitation of this study, it is to recommended for the future researcher to get sufficient time to study the writing sample over a longer period of time and do more in-depth study on this topic. It would have produced more comprehensive and interesting results

if this study was conducted in a substantial amount of time. Besides that, this study focused solely on the component of writing. Additional research might take the study one step further by including the interference of the speaking skills. The speaking skills would be a longitudinal study on the development of phonological skills among Malay students would provide an additional insight into L1 interference on L2. A similar research study involving various batch and faculty can be conducted consisting a larger sample of respondent to study the L1 interference in the writing of L2. After all, this study was conducted by focusing on specifically TESL students to be the sample of this study. In order to provides more valid information regarding the perceptions and impact of L1 interferences, thus it is suggested that a sample size should be used. In addition, it is also suggested that the future researcher to obtain the high achiever sample in the subject English language to obtain richer data for the study as well as make vital comparisons on the perceptions and impacts interferes the students' achievement and proficiency in the target language. Last but not least, the current study used a quantitative approach which written test and questionnaire were used to collect data. Therefore, it is suggested for the future research to use the qualitative research approach as well. It can be done by conducting a semi-structured interview, observation as well as document analysis to gain greater corpus to study the perception and impact that contribute to the students' difficulties in learning English as second language.

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### **L1 Interference in L2 Writing: A Study on Year 3 BTESL Students**

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