The Challenges of Used Extensive Reading in Teaching Malay as a Foreign Language

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The ML (Malay Language) is one of the foreign languages taught to students at the DMIT (Department of Malay-Indonesian Translation & Interpretation), HUFS (Hankuk University of Foreign Studies), Yongin Campus. The students here are required to learn both the Malay and Indonesian languages, which are under the same parent language. The students found that it is difficult to identify the differences between the two languages, because most of the linguistic features are highly similar. It is much easier to explain the differences in terms of the terminology and spelling, but trying to explain the writing style or the structure of a sentence is a more challenging task. Thus, ER (extensive reading) activities were undertaken with a view to expose the students to the ML by using various forms of written materials. ER was also a means for students to experience restricted communication in Malay, because the students had very limited opportunities to use the ML outside the classroom. The materials used in this activity were made available for the students in printed form or accessible via the internet. Sub-activities besides reading were conducted in the classroom to complement the lecture. The contact hours were 80 minutes per week and the activity was conducted for seven weeks. Reading is done either individually or as a group depending on the type of material, length and difficulty, or the students' level of proficiency. Some of the problems or constraints in conducting ER activities include the difficulty in finding materials which are suitable for both learning and maintaining the students' interest in the reading materials provided.

Keywords: ML (Malay language), Indonesian language, printed material, sub-activities

Introduction

ER (Extensive reading) activities were conducted for students enrolled in the Malay-Indonesian Comparative Linguistics program in the March-June 2013 semester at the HUFS (Hankuk University of Foreign Studies) Yongin, which aims at exposing the students to the Malaysian ML (Malay Language) or Bahasa Melayu. The students in this program are either already fluent in the ML or are at least able speak Indonesian Malay (Bahasa Melayu Indonesia). The IL (Indonesian Language) is studied in greater depth than the ML, because the former was introduced first to the university (Zaharani & Kim, 2012), and there is sufficient local teaching staff plus two additional guest lecturers from Indonesia. The ML is introduced as a complementary subject and aimed at increasing the experience in the language, as well as a form of support for the economic and trade activities (Chun, 2012a) with Malaysia. Therefore, a series of lectures from Malaysia was introduced to provide a language experience among students. This effort provides an opportunity for the students to interact and communicate in the ML environment, at least during the last 80 minutes of lecture. A

direct impact of this approach is that the students were always trying to use various forms of greetings in the ML when greeting their lecturers. This phrase is learned either autonomously by the students (through self-study) or introduced by the lecturer during the teaching and learning sessions. Through continuous interaction from time to time and after several sessions of lectures, it is rather apparent that the students remained confused about the differences that exist between the ML and IL, specifically in terms of vocabulary and sentence structures (Chun & Normaliza, 2012).

> ML: Selamat pagi—selamat tengahari—selamat petang—selamat malam
>
> IL: Selamat pagi—selamat siang—selamat sore—selamat malam
>
> ML: Jumpa lagi; IL: Sampai jumpa.
>
> ML: Boleh saya bercakap dengan puan sekejap?
>
> IL: Bisa saya berbicara dengan ibu sebentar?
>
> ML: Makan tengahari; IL: Makan siang

Figure 1. Greetings and situation.

In general, both greetings (see Figure 1) could be understood by both the Malay and Indonesian speakers, because spelling and terminology systems are relatively high in similarity. But, in the social and cultural context, there is very little difference in terms of the language style, intonation, common vocabulary (Awang, 2012) or sociolinguistic (Chun, 2012b). This creates different impacts in terms of interaction and communication. These similarities and differences were explained to the students from time to time within the teaching—learning process and through the ER and the activities carried out with it. Understanding these differences leads to an assimilation process which is hopefully able to lessen the gap between a group with other groups, including the majority of the minority group (Poerwanti, 2012). For the foreign students learning the ML, a knowledge of these differences may help them to adapt and communicate with the Malaysian community more successfully.

Implementation of the ER

ER was chosen as the approach used to provide students with a wider ML experience. Through the reading process, the students can discover the features of the language in a different setting compared to the ordinary language learning (lecture) sessions. This is immensely useful for the students because as is the norm, linguistic courses are often filled with jargons, specific terminologies, language theories and history. The ER's principles offered an approach and activities that could be adapted in the class to make reading in a foreign language more interesting and not seen as a burden. These activities were carried out for 80 minutes in the seven weeks of lectures, commencing after the middle of the semester, and completed before the final exam week. There has been some variation in the duration of the implementation of the ER from other studies, for example one year (He & Green, 2012) and 10 days within a period of three months by Al-Nujaidi (Al-Homoud & Schmitt, 2009). This study aims to expose the students to the differences that exist between the Malay and Indonesian languages through activities related to the reading. The chosen ER materials, which consist of materials discussing various issues, were deemed able to stimulate students' interest and maintain their focus on the reading materials. Through ER the students were able to gain exposure to the vocabulary, sentence structures, the Malay culture, and Malaysia in general. Shaffer (2012), Day, Bamford, and Lee (2002), have produced a

list of 10 basic principles for an effective the implementation of the ER activity: easy reading materials which do not contain too many new words, covering a broad range of titles and students are free to choose their reading material. ER should also be carried out individually and silently, using the speedy reading technique and suitable reading materials for the students' level of proficiency. The reading should be conducted as a leisurely activity but with the aim of understanding the material and increasing general knowledge. The reader should gain benefits from the reading, while lecturers provide guidance and act as role models for the inculcation of the reading habit.

Before the implementation of the ER activity, some preparation in terms of reading materials, syllabus, and sub-activities was taken into account. These aspects should be fully considered in planning an ER activity, because the time is relatively short and the reading materials which would suit and fulfil the syllabus and sub-activities are needed to attract the interest of students to maintain their interest in the reading. The following is a list of the reading materials in the ML used during the ER activity: (1) folklore/traditional/classic stories; (2) drama scripts; (3) *Utusan Online* articles; (4) *Kompas Online* articles; (5) online books; and (6) selected titles from Wikipedia. Several activities were carried out simultaneously with the implementation of the ER so that students feel more motivated to finish reading the books/reading materials. The selection of online materials is not only due to the lack of printed materials in Malay but this approach was also found to attract attention and interest in reading (C. N. Chen, S. C. Chen, S. H. E. Chen, & Wey, 2013), because students can access these materials anywhere.

Findings and Discussion

The principles in the implementation of the ER activity are emphasizing enjoyment and fluency in reading. This reading environment can be created through the selection of reading materials that are not too heavy, with fewer new and difficult words and at the appropriate level of the student's proficiency. At HUFS, Yongin, obtaining the reading materials was not a problem because the materials could be found in the library, accessed via the internet and provided by the lecturer or lecturers themselves. Besides that, there are varieties of reading materials online (internet) which can be accessed and used during the ER activity compared to the printed reading materials/books, which were quite limited. The challenge here is to find a reading material with few new and difficult words, but suitable with the students' proficiency level and interest. A reading material which contained simple words or was too short usually discussed a very simple topic or issue. This could make the students feel that material is at a very low level and not suitable for them. Therefore, the selection of reading materials is more diverse according to the specific needs or interest of the students, current issues, and general titles. The reading, according to the ER principles, is expected to be an individual and silent activity. In this case, most of the time, it is the individual reading, but from time to time, if there is a misunderstanding of the meaning of difficult words, students are free to ask a question for help and clarification, as well as refer to the dictionary. The use of a dictionary in the ER is not required (MacLeod, 2012), because reading should be relaxed. However, for students learning Malay as a foreign language, referring to a dictionary could help them learn the meaning and use of the new words, and to better understand the content of the reading materials.

Understanding difficult words and the inability to find the meaning of these words are among the common barriers for the students to read, understand, and enjoy any reading material or books. At the end of the ER session, most of the students were not able to finish their reading. To encourage or sustain their interest in the reading material, the lecturer would explain briefly about the titles that the students were reading. Explanations

about their reading material could help them have a better idea about the materials and try to complete the readings. For the purpose of enhancing the students' understanding and experience with the ML, the meaning for every word that is poorly understood was provided, explained, and used in examples. During the ER activity, students were asked to share with/ask other students and lecturers the meaning of difficult words. This process is ongoing, so that the students did not feel too burdened by always having to refer to the dictionary, which in turn may impede their reading process. Here is a list of difficult words frequently asked by the students (see Figure 2):

ML: kara (sebatang kara), perlahan-lahan, koyak-rabak, berbual-bual, serta-merta, menitahkan, seketika, oleh, termenung, menyeksa, bersorak, cekik-mencekik, bercucuk-tanam, asyik, kesyukuran, berpenat, mengembara, dilambung-lambung, berazam, impian, menjenguk, terperanjat, berpusu-pusu, berambus, penuh, beredar, melangkah, pengail, sebarang, berehat, terlaksana, berdebar-debar.

IL (Google Translate): kara (*sebatang kara*), <u>lembut</u>, koyak-*rabak*, <u>mengobrol</u>, <u>segera</u>, menitahkan, seketika, oleh, termenung, <u>menyiksa</u>, bersorak, cekik-*mencekik*, <u>bercocok</u>-*tanam*, asyik, <u>syukur</u>, berpenat, <u>bepergian</u>, dilambung-*lambung*, <u>bertekad</u>, impian, menjenguk, terperanjat, <u>berkumpul</u>, berambus, penuh, beredar, melangkah, pengail, <u>apapun</u>, <u>beristirahat</u>, terlaksana, <u>berdebar</u>.

English: alone, slowly, rags, talk, instantly, commands, while, by, pensive, tortured, cheering, strangle each other, gardening, fun, gratitude, afford, travel, tossed, determined, dream, looked, surprised, flocked, get lost, full, leave, move, anglers, any, relax, implemented, palpitations.

Figure 2. Malay words, Indonesian translation by *Google Translate* and English translation.

Students were seen using several types of dictionaries, including those sources introduced to them as the authentic reference source: *Pusat Rujukan Persuratan Melayu* (Malay Letters Reference Center) at prpm.dbp.gov.my, *Google Translate*, and *Dictionary of Indonesian-Korean*. Based on a translation from the ML to the Indonesian language (see Figure 2), they may find a few differences between the two languages. Searching through the Malay Literary Reference Center may provide the meaning and examples of usage, but this site has not yet provided a translation or explanation in other languages except those chosen by *Kamus Melayu* (*The Malay Dictionary*), *Kamus Inggeris* (*The English Dictionary*), *Istilah Malaysia* (*The Malaysia Terminologies*), *Bahasa Melayu Sukuan* (*The Malay Dialects*), and *Kamus Dewan Thai* (*The Dewan Thai Dictionary*). As a result of this, the students were either using or referring to the Indonesian-Korean dictionary or using another translation engine on the internet. A student using *Google Translate* may select the mode of the Korean-Malay. Among the most difficult words for the students were the reduplicated words. A test was conducted using a translation engine for the reduplicated word "berdebar-debar": This engine merely provided the meaning (the translated word marked yellow when clicked) of the word "debar" (flutter) only, while the word "berdebar" (pounding) was not translated. But the choice of various languages, including the Korean language, provided by *Google Translate*, made it easier for the students to find the meaning of the words from the ML in their native language.

In the selection of independent reading materials, it appears that the concept is not free in the real sense, because the students were not able to decide for themselves what they wanted to read in the absence of guidance from the lecturer. Measures were taken to overcome this problem. The lecturers provided a theme for the reading materials and the students were asked to bring the chosen reading materials to the lecture room and

read them within the allotted time. Besides that, the students could borrow books from the library, print their favorite articles from the newspaper or online materials or read online books that have been selected by the lecturer. For the next ER session, students were reminded to read online newspapers, on any topic of their interest and conducted at appropriate times. The aim of the sub-activity is to provide exposure on the different styles of ML writing in discussing current issues. This activity is not directly monitored by the lecturer as per during reading sessions in class, but the students were left to choose a suitable time and an article from the newspapers. Sports, health and medicine, Malaysian culture, Korean issues and K-Pop, economy, and lifestyle, were among the popular topics chosen by the students to carry out the "self-reading or home-reading" activities.

Meanwhile, in the lecture room, the ER activity was closely monitored. An article from the newspaper *Kompas Online* (a newspaper in Indonesian language) was selected, read and the title and content were discussed briefly. After giving a brief explanation of the article, the next activity is to translate or rewrite 10 sentences from the article in the ML. The purpose of this activity is to identify whether the Malay vocabulary is different or the same as the Indonesian language, which was learned by the students over a number of interactions and teaching-learning sessions. After all the students had completed their translations, they exchanged the answer sheets with each other and reviewed the answers with some explanation from the lecturer. The answers given showed that the students had begun to identify some of the differences between the Malay and Indonesian languages. Despite the fact that the structure of the sentences still needed some improvements, this had been a very good attempt. Here is one of the student's translations (underlined words are differences detected by student) (see Figure 3):

IL: *Siapa bilang dapur hanya teritori Kaum Hawa?*

ML: *Siapa bilang dapur hanya <u>wilayah</u> Kaum Hawa?*

Answer: *Siapa kata dapur adalah kawasan Kaum Hawa sahaja?*

IL: *Kini, kegiatan masak-memasak juga dapat dilakukan, bahkan digemari oleh Kaum Adam.*

ML: *Kini, <u>aktiviti</u> masak-memasak juga boleh dilakukan, bahkan digemari oleh Kaum Adam.*

Answer: *Sekarang/kini, aktiviti masak-memasak juga dilakukan, malah turut digemari oleh Kaum Adam.*

IL: *Hanya, perbedaan selera antara kedua jenis kelamin ini membuat tidak semua pria nyaman memasak di dapur "milik" para wanita.*

ML: *Hanya, <u>perbezaan</u> selera antara kedua jenis kelamin ini membuat tidak semua <u>lelaki selera</u> memasak di dapur "milik" para wanita.*

Answer: *Citarasa berbeza antara kedua jantina ini yang membuatkan kaum lelaki kurang selesa memasak di dapur "milik" kaum wanita.*

IL: *Wanita umumnya senang dengan dapur dekoratif*

ML: *Wanita umumnya senang dengan dapur <u>hiasan</u>.*

Answer: *Pada asasnya wanita suka kepada dapur bertema.*

Figure 3. Original, translated and answer.

The ER reading process was done individually, silently, and with the help of speedy reading, but in this case, the principle was not fully implemented. This was because the selected materials were compiled from various topics with many words which were poorly understood or unknown to the students. However, the

students were still doing ER leisure activities and trying to understand the material as well as gaining general knowledge. Through the translation and revision activities performed in class, the students found new vocabulary, an opportunity to experience more about the ML, and a learning experience different from regular lectures and discussions. They also acquired, from the mistakes or the accuracy of the answers given by other students, an understanding the structure of sentences and the right words or terms to use in the ML. These activities also created a cheerful situation and increased confidence among the students, because there was very little pressure as no scores were given. The modifications of the ER implemented in this study were aimed at sustaining the interest, focus and determination of the students towards the reading materials that was introduced to them. Lecturers should also be more tolerant of the students' difficulties in understanding their reading materials. There were students who were able to read up to two books of short stories within one session of ER, but many of them were only able to finish a book after two weeks reading session was conducted.

The number of materials that can be read by each student during the ER activity was still low with an average of two story books, two articles from online newspapers, one title from Wikipedia, and at least one student read the general book on the E-class website. In one of the activities other than the ER, the students were given a virtual address of ML's online books and they were asked to read through its link in the E-Class, an interactive site provided by the university which aims to facilitate the process of teaching and learning and communication between lecturers and students. One of the functions of this site is the sharing of lecture materials and readings. One of the uploaded materials on these pages was for additional reading and references and the students were asked to read during their leisure time. When the list (see Figure 4) of visitors or students who read or at least have seen the material were studied, only three out of 17 students involved with the course did as instructed.

2013-1 Semester

Reading & Writing in Elementary Malay-Indonesian (1)

Lecture Time: Mon 5 6				
현재본문위치 : ⊞▸Education Status▸Lecture Subjects▸**Lecture Data**				
Name	Student ID	Department	First Inquiry Time	Inquiry
		말레이.인도네시아어통번역학과	05.28 AM 09:56	1
		말레이.인도네시아어통번역학과	06.02 PM 11:19	1
		말레이.인도네시아어통번역학과	06.16 PM 09:22	2

Figure 4. E-class web site.

The E-class page (see Figure 4) recorded the presence or time, name, and number of students who accessed the link, which contains online books as one of the ER activities. The record showed that only three out of 15 students who registered for this course had accessed the reading materials. Although the topic of these book was related to the syllabus (i.e., language and linguistics), the reading activity for these books was not conducted in the classroom because the topic was more dense. The students were advised to read it when they had free time to add to their existing knowledge of the ML linguistics. But this result showed that the students did not take the initiative to read the online book except for three students. Although this record cannot be used to generalize the overall reading attitude among the students, it has proven that the ER

approach is very helpful to improve knowledge about the language if the students understand the purpose of this activity. This shows that students in this class still need to be encouraged to read by themselves without being observed by lecturers.

Conclusions

The seven-week ER sessions have reached the aims of providing an exposure to the students about the ML and the resources that they can use in the future. But the number of reading materials read by each student was still at a low level and requires a longer period of time so that they can familiarize themselves with the ML reading materials so as to allow for a more smooth and enjoyable reading. Students' attitudes towards online reading materials were not in line with the facilities, equipments, and resources that can be used for ER. There is a need for a program which can encourage the students to read not only in order to learn the language but also for the benefits derived from these activities such as language proficiency and fluency, knowledge and experience, and the understanding of important information related to the cultural background of the foreign language. In future research, there are a few things that should be taken into account when running an ER activity, specifically the level of reading materials that should be parallel to the students' language proficiency and the students' understanding about the activity and its purpose. The ER activity has shown them an approach to overcome the problem of finding suitable books or reading materials. Another significant impact of this ER activity other than the reading experience itself is the knowledge of the differences and similarities of ML (*Bahasa Melayu*) and IL (*Bahasa Indonesia*). There are many issues that can be discussed about Malay as a foreign language, especially, in module preparation, learning strategies, teaching approach and reading materials. It is time for the relevant body of authority to coordinate or advice about the teaching and learning of Malay language as a foreign language.

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