

## **Definiteness And Indefiniteness: A Contrastive Analysis Of The Use Of Determiners Between The Malay Language And English**

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### **Abstract**

This paper aims to investigate the Malay language interference in the production of erroneous English structures among secondary ESL learners. The strong version of Contrastive Analysis claims that the differences between L1 and L2 structures results in negative transfer due to the transfer of old habits into new ones. However, this version of CA is only predictive in nature and is not always true. Errors made by learners give us better insights into the process of language learning. Thus, errors are now regarded as a very important tool for diagnostic purposes in language teaching. The procedure in carrying out this investigation follows Norrish's (1992) approach to conducting Error Analysis. This includes sample collection, identifying, describing errors, explaining and evaluating errors. The corpus of this research consists of 873 sentences, collected from 51 essay samples. There were 826 uses of determiners with 175 occurrences of errors. The subjects were Malaysian secondary school students who are learners of English as a second language. The results indicate that determiner is a possible problematic area for Malay learners of English. The different aspects of the incorrect use of English determiners that reflect the Malay grammar are related to specific places of location, instrument, countries as Adjectives, name of Subject, agreement to the Noun, and Cardinal numbers. The differences in the possessive forms in both languages also attributed to the errors.

### **Introduction**

The strong version of Contrastive Analysis claims that the differences between L1 and L2 structures results in negative transfer due to the transfer of old habits into new ones. However, this version of CA is only predictive in nature and is not always true. Errors made by learners give us better insights into the process of language learning. Due to this, errors are now regarded as a very important tool for diagnostic purposes in language teaching.

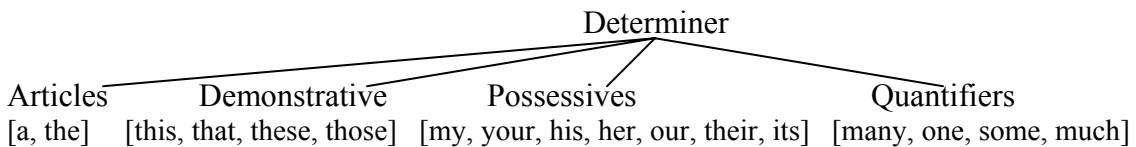
This paper aims to investigate Malay interference as a possible cause in the production of erroneous English structures among ESL learners. The corpus of this research consists of 873 sentences, collected from 51 essay samples. The subjects were Malaysian secondary school students who are learners of English as a second language.

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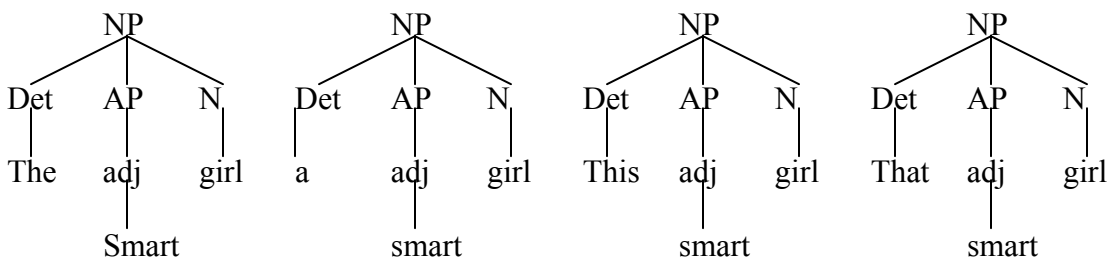
### Determiner

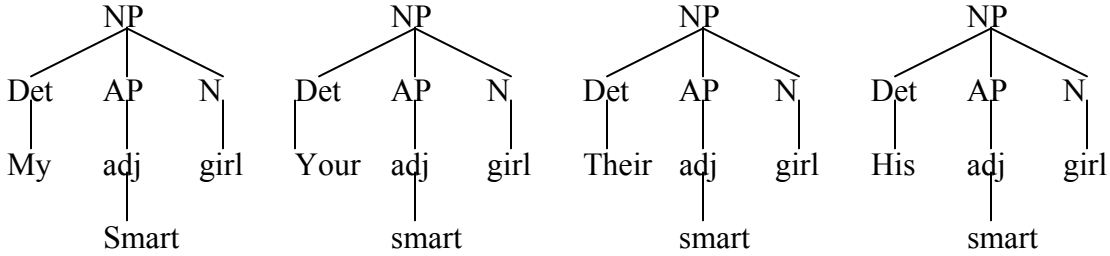
Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1991: 19) describes *determiner* as a special class of words that limits (or determines) the nouns that follow them. These words could be in the form of articles (*the, a(n)*), demonstratives (*this, that, these, those*), and possessive determiners (*my, your, his, her, its, our, their*). Structurally, determiner precedes an adjective if there are adjectives in the noun phrase. In cases where no adjectives are present, they are positioned directly in front of a noun. Where the sentence "I put *my* backpack on *the* front porch, and now I can't find it." Is concerned, two determiners can be detected. The first is *my*, a possessive determiner that precedes the noun *backpack* while the second is *the*, a definite article that precedes the adjective *front*. In both cases, both *my backpack* and *the front porch* are noun phrases.

Where the English structure is concerned, we can say that a determiner is an optional element in the noun phrase that occurs at the front most position in the noun phrase. It can be in a form of definite / indefinite articles, demonstrative or possessive determiners and of course, quantifiers.

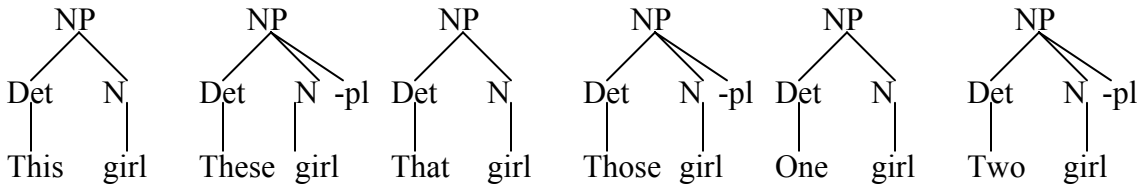


Below is the deep structure of a noun phrase with various forms of determiners.

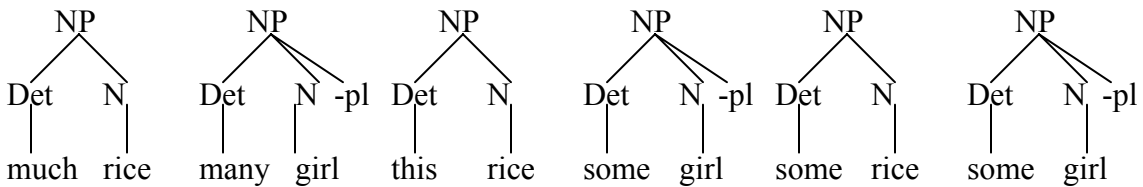




Since determiners are modifiers of nouns, where the English structure is concerned, they are often restricted with respect to the number and / or countability of the head nouns with which they can co-occur. In other words, there are some determiners that occur only with singular count nouns like *a*, *one*, *another* and there are also determiners that occur only with plural count nouns: *these*, *those*, *many*, *both*, *two*, *three*, and so on (1999: 83).

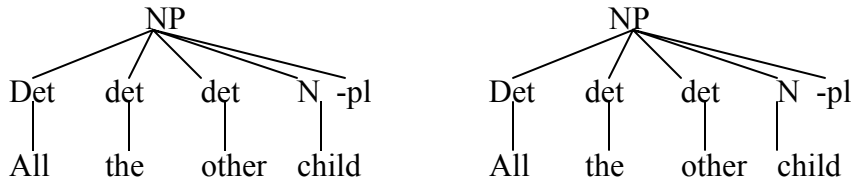


There are a few determiners that occur only with uncountable nouns and they are the quantifiers *much*, and (*a*) *little* while there are also some determiners that occur with either singular or uncountable nouns such as *this* and *that*. Determiners like *some*, *all*, *no*, and *other* occur with either plural nouns or uncountable nouns, while determiners such as *the*, *my*, *his*, and other possessive determiners, can occur with any kind of common noun and thus are not restricted with regard to the number and countability of the head noun. These agreement features are useful information about determiners and nouns that are unique to a language like the English language (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman 1999: 83).



Where the English language is concerned, there can be as many as 3 determiners prior to the head noun. *All the other*, *my other two*, *the first four*. The determiner slot itself consists of three subcategories: (1) predeterminers (words like *all* and *both*), (ii) core determiners (articles like *a* and *the*, demonstratives like *this* and *that*, and possessives like *my* and *his*), and (iii) postdeterminers (quantifiers like *three* and comparative reference

terms like *other*, both of which may occur in either order). (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman 1999: 83).



Like the English language, determiner in the Malay language forms part of a noun phrase. Coined as *kata penentu* in the Malay grammar (Abdullah Hassan 1993: 54), the Malay equivalent to the English determiner, however, is often illustrated as, and only limited to, the words “itu” and “ini”. These words, on the other hand, are described by the *Kamus Dewan* (Third Edition) as kata penunjuk.

Nik Safiah Karim (1995), on the other hand, describes both “itu” and “ini” as demonstrative determiners (pp. 14) and definite articles (pp. 15). She illustrates the use of “itu” as definite article in *Pelukis itu rakyat Australia* (for *The artist is an Australian citizen*). She also shows in the paper that the Malay sentence can also be translated as *That artist is an Australian citizen* – only that the one with the word *that* has both deictic and numeral connotations; and that the example she chooses is not in relation to the above Malay sentence.

In comparing the Malay grammar to that of the English, Nik Safiah Karim (1995: 9-15) demonstrates the use of the English determiners as follows:

Pekerja itu telah tiba.  
(Noun + Det: Dem<sup>1</sup>)  
The worker has arrived.  
(Det: Art + Noun)

Pelanggan saya Puan Chong  
(Noun + Det: Pos<sup>2</sup>)  
My client is Mrs Chong.  
(Det: Pos + Noun)

Sepupu dia pekerja kilang.  
(Noun + Det: Pos)  
His cousin is a factory worker.  
(Det: Pos + Noun)

Teman saya sangat rajin.  
(Noun + Det: Pos)  
My friend is very industrious.  
(Det: Pos + Noun)

Ibu itu  
(Noun + Det: dem)  
That mother  
(Det: dem + Noun)

Seluar biru ini  
(Noun + Adj + Det: dem)  
This blue trousers  
(Det: dem + Adj + Noun)

<sup>1</sup> Demonstrative Determiner

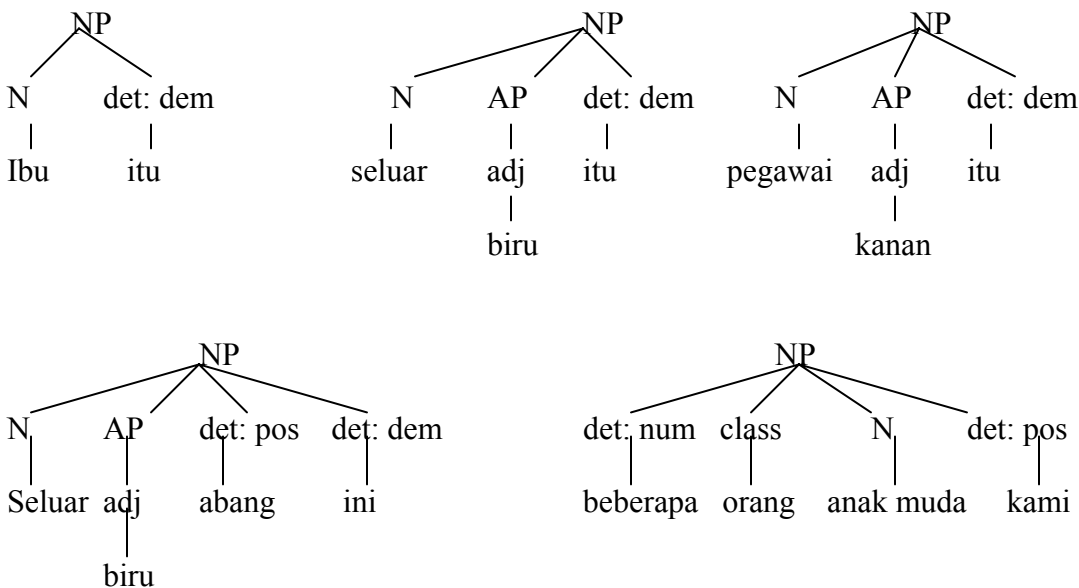
<sup>2</sup> Possessive Determiner

Seluar biru *abang ini*  
(Noun + Adj + *Det: Pos* + *Det: Dem*)  
*This elder brother's* blue trousers  
(*Det: dem* + *Det: Pos* + Adj + Noun)

Pegawai kanan *itu*  
(Noun + Adj + *Det: Dem*)  
*That* senior officer  
(*Det: Dem* + Adj + Noun)

Despite the difference in the terms used, they structurally agree in the sense that the words “itu” and “ini” has to be the final element in any Malay noun phrases. Should there be modifiers after the head noun, the modifiers come between the head noun (on the left) and the “kata penentu” (on the right). Abdullah Hassan (1993: 54) stresses that there must not be any other word after the “kata penentu” in the Malay noun phrase. Abdullah Hassan’s description is true to a certain extent because he does not regard numerals as determiner.

Where this study is concerned, the Malay numerals are regarded as determiners since they, like quantifying determiners, quantify the nouns. Thus, using Awang Sariyan’s example of a Noun Phrase (1988: 81), the noun phrase “Beberapa orang anak muda kami” [Some of our younger generations] is described as *Det: Num* + Classifier + Compound Noun + *Det: Pos*. Another example, also from Awang Sariyan (1988: 87) would be “Tangan kirinya” [His left hand], which could be explicated by Noun + Adjective + *Det: Pos*. Thus, using the deep structure in syntactical analysis by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999), the tree diagram for the noun phrases would be drawn as the following.



Where this study is concerned, it is observed that out of 826 uses of determiners in the students’ writing, a total of 175 (21%) of errors were detected. Although not all errors are due to mother tongue interference, a large number of errors that occurred in the use of determiners does indicate interference of the Malay grammar. The following subheadings

illustrate the instances of the incorrect use of English determiners that reflect the Malay grammar.

### Specific Places or Locations

In the Malay grammar, the name of specific places or location like *park, canteen, school, sea* need be collocated with determiners, unless those places or locations have been specified earlier, or expressed deictically. Thus, expression like the following is grammatically correct in the Malay grammar.

- Kadang-kadang, saya membawanya ke taman untuk bermain.
- Selain dari itu, saya akan mendapat kenalan dari serata dunia seperti Perancis, Amerika Syarikat dan England.
- Kami juga pergi ke kantin bersama-sama.
- Dia bekerja sebagai seorang pembaca meter di Jabatan Air Jerantut.
- Tsunami disebabkan oleh kejadian dari laut.

Unlike the Malay language, the mentioning of those places or location in English requires a determiner, in any case. If the expressions are not expressed deictically, it will then be expressed either with a definite article, or an indefinite article. Thus, where this research is concerned, the students fail to insert the article “the” and produces sentences like the following:

- \* Sometimes I bring it to \_\_ park to play
- \* Moreover, I will have friends from around the world such as France, \_\_ United States and England.
- \* We also go to \_\_ canteen together.
- \* He works as a meter reader at \_\_ Jerantut Water Department.
- \* Tsunami was caused by an effect from \_\_ sea.

### Instruments

The Malay grammar also does not require one to have any form of determiner in front of instruments like *computer, piano, internet*. Thus, sentences like the following are acceptable.

- Hobi saya adalah berbasikal, bermain komputer, bermain bolasepak dan membaca novel.
- Kadang-kadang saya mengulangkaji menerusi internet.
- Dia bermain piano sementara saya menyanyi.

The English grammar, however, requires the instruments mentioned above be preceded by determiners and if neither a possessive determiner nor a demonstrative determiner is used, the use of either a definite article or an indefinite article is necessary. Thus, the

sentences below, that could be result of an interference of the Malay language, are ungrammatical.

- \* My hobbies are cycling, playing \_\_ computer, playing football, and reading novel.
- \* Sometimes I do my revision from \_\_ internet.
- \* She plays \_\_ piano while I sing.

### **Countries as Adjectives**

In the Malay language, when using the name of a country as adjectives that modify the head noun, no determiners are required as in the following:

- Saya mahu menjadi seperti Khalid Jamlus, penyerang pasukan bolasepak Malaysia.
- Saya mempunyai banyak setem-setem dunia seperti setem Amerika, setem Australia dan pelbagai lagi

English, on the other hand, requires a determiner before the Adjective which can appear in all forms.

- \* I want to be like “Khalid Jamlus”, the striker of \_\_ Malaysian football team.
- \* I have many world stamps such as \_\_ American stamps, \_\_ Australian stamps and many more.

### **Name of Subject/Programme**

In referring to a particular subject or programme, no determiner is required. Thus, the following Malay sentences are grammatical.

- Saya suka matapelajaran bahasa Inggeris kerana matapelajaran tersebut memperkenalkan...
- Saya juga meminati matapelajaran sains kerana matapelajaran ini membincangkan...
- Nasib baik kami berada dalam kelas yang sama kerana dia dari kelas peralihan.

However, mentioning the name of a subject without the definite article “the” makes the sentence ungrammatical.

- \* I like \_\_ English subject because the subject introduces me to many words...
- \* I also like \_\_ science subject because this subject discusses
- \* Luckily, we are in the same class because she is from remove class.

### Agreement to the Noun

Subject-verb-agreement is not a property of the Malay language and thus, the determiners that precede a noun need not agree with the nouns itself.

- Kesemua negeri tersebut kehilangan harta mereka.

As mentioned above, some determiners of the English language have to agree with the noun that comes after it. Thus, “\*this balls” would be ungrammatical and the correct version would be “these balls”. The example below shows that the choice of determiner could be to the interference of the students’ mother tongue.

- \* All this countries lost their property.

### Forms of Possessive Determiner

The forms of the Malay possessive determiners are similar to that of the noun in question. In mentioning “my ball”, a person would express it in Malay as “bola saya”, with “saya” in the similar form as the nominative case for “I”. The forms of the Malay possessive determiners also remain the same when a proper name is used. For example, for “Ali’s ball”, the grammatical Malay form would be “bola Ali”, with no inflections of any forms are required. Possessive determiners in the form of common nouns would also remain the way a common noun would look like and these common nouns also come after the head noun.

- Pada masa lapang saya, saya mengumpul setem.
- Saya dan keluarga saya amat sedih dan bersimpati dengan keluarga pemandu itu
- Nama ibu saya ialah Zaleha binti Yusuff.
- Dia seorang ibu yang cantik dan baik terhadap anak-anaknya
- Hobi ibu saya adalah memasak, membaca dan lain-lain.
- Namanya ialah Fiona Tee.
- Hari ini adalah harijadi Princess Isabella.
- Princess Isabella sangat marah dengan tindakan lelaki itu
- Hobinya melukis.
- Nama kawan baik saya ialah Nurina Bt Nasaruddin.
- Namanya ialah Haziq.

In contrast, the forms of English possessive determiners are dissimilar to that of the noun in question. “my ball”, for example, would take a genitive form as it is a genitive case, while “Ali” would have to be inflected to “Ali’s” to show that Ali is the possessor of the ball. Common nouns also have to be inflected to “teacher’s ball” to show that the ball belongs to the “teacher” and all of them come before the head noun.



- \* During I leisure hours, I collect the stamps.
- \* My family and I were very sad and sympathise with the driver family
- \* My mother name is Zaleha binti Yusuff.
- \* She is a beautiful mother and kind to his children.
- \* My mother hobbies are cooking, reading and others.
- \* She's name is Fiona Tee.
- \* Today was Princess Isabella birthday.
- \* Princess Isabella was very angry at the man action.
- \* She's hobby is drawing.
- \* My best friend name is Nurina Bt Nasaruddin.
- \* He name is Haziq.

### **Cardinal numbers**

Malay grammar does not require any form of a determiner to precede a cardinal number. Thus, sentences like the ones below are perfect in the Malay language.

- Dia lahir pada 1 Oktober 1992.
- Dia anak ke enam dari tujuh orang adik beradik.

However, in the English language, mentioning a cardinal number without a definite article (i.e. the) is grammatically incorrect. Thus, the following examples illustrate that there might be a transfer from the Malay language into the students' production in the English language.

- \* She was born on \_\_ 1<sup>st</sup> October 1992
- \* She is \_\_ fifth from seven siblings.

### **Conclusion**

All the above sub-sections clearly shows that although approaching the teaching of the English language from the Contrastive Analysis perspective seems not to be a popular approach, in the teaching of English determiners to Malaysians, the use of Contrastive Analysis might just be the best tool to teach the subject matter. It is hoped that the analysis and illustration of the above data could help teachers to plan their English lessons and approach their teaching of English determiners in the manner that is most appropriate to their students.

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