English or Singlish? The Syntactic Influences of Chinese and Malay on the Learning of English in Singapore

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Abstract

This paper examines the syntactic influences of the Singapore students' mother tongues on the students' learning of English in the classroom. Singlish arises due to the influences of the students' mother tongues on the lexical, syntactic and discourse aspects of English used by the students. As Chinese and Malays form the majority of the population in Singapore, this study focuses on the influences of Chinese and Malay on the learning of English in the classroom. The primary source of data consists of written assignments done by a group of adult learners studying in a polytechnic in Singapore. The overt influences of Chinese and Malay on the students' learning of English indicate that language teachers in Singapore need to take into consideration the transfer and interference of the students' mother tongues in the students' writing and speaking.

Introduction

This paper examines the syntactic influences of the Singapore students' mother tongues on the students' learning of English in the classroom. As Chinese and Malays form the majority of the population in Singapore, this study focuses on the influences of Chinese and Malay on the learning of English in the classroom. The primary source of data consists of 28 written assignments done by a group of adult learners studying in a polytechnic in Singapore. Further evidence comes from the writings of educators and researchers who have conducted research in the Singapore schools.

"Influence" refers to "L1 transfer" which is the influence that the learner's first language exerts over the acquisition of the second language (Ellis, 1997, p. 51). However, as the word "transfer" has, through time, connotes a restricted and negative connotation, some writers prefer the terms "mother tongue influence", "cross-linguistic influence" or "cross-linguistic generalization" (Kellerman and Smith, 1986; Odlin, 1989; Corder, 1992; Gass, 1996). A number of writers like

Marton (1981) and Bright and McGregor (1970) have highlighted the role of the students' first language on the learning of English. According to the behaviourist learning theory, the transfer from the first to the second language may be negative or positive: negative transfer or interference takes place when there is proactive inhibition which leads to errors, while positive transfer or facilitation takes place when the first and second language habits are the same and errors do not take place (Ellis, 1985, p. 22). Gass and Selinker add that the type of interference for second language acquisition is proactive inhibition where a series of responses already learned tends to appear in situations where a new set is required; specifically, the first language influences, inhibits and modifies the learning of the second language (2001, p. 68). Beside errors, L1 transfer could also result in avoidance. Researchers note that Chinese learners make fewer errors in relative clauses than other learners because their second language, Chinese, does not contain equivalent structures, and hence they rarely use them (Ellis, 1997, pp. 51-52; Schachter, 1974).

Before discussing the influences of Chinese and Malay on the students' writings, it is necessary to understand the context on which such cross-linguistic influences take place. Singapore is a multiracial country with Chinese (77%), Malays (14%), Indians (7%) and other races. While the various ethnic groups have their own mother tongues (Mandarin, Malay and Tamil), English is the official working language in Singapore (Tongue, 1976; Kuo, 1977). This bilingual policy with English as the first language and the mother tongue as the second language means that the learning of English is likely to be influenced by the languages of the Chinese, Malays and other races (Richards, 1977; Pakir, 1998; 2001). Writers distinguish between a High variety of English called "Standard English" (StdE) and a Low variety of English known as "Singapore Colloquial English" (SCE) (Gupta, 1986; 1994; Brown, 1999). Singlish arises due to the influences of the students' mother tongues on the lexical, syntactic and discourse aspects of English used by the students (Phoon, 1973; Platt and Ho, 1989; Platt, Weber and Ho, 1983; Yeo and Deterding, 2003; Gupta, 1994). In fact, it has been shown that "Singaporeans can successfully identify the ethnic group of a Singaporean speaker on the basis of an utterance just ten seconds long, with an accuracy rate of over 90% for identifying young educated speakers as either Chinese or Malay" (Deterding and Poedjosoedarmo, 2000; Lim, 2000). In their research on the compositions of 80 secondary two students (average age is 13.7), Yeo and Deterding conclude that "certain patterns

of grammatical usage are slightly different for Malay and Chinese secondary pupils in Singaporean schools, indicating that there may be some influences from the ethnic language that they learn in school." (Yeo and Deterding, 2003, p. 83; Deterding and Poedjosoedarmo, 2001). Based on a study of 43 students in Singapore, Wong also concludes that students tend to think in Chinese even though they are writing in English (1998, p. 327). This is true not only for both students and trainee teachers studying at the National Institute of Education in Singapore (Low and Deterding, 2003). Poedjosoedarmo points out that students at the university level "report that many of their 'errors' in writing are due not to their not knowing the rules of standard English but rather to interference from colloquial English which they use daily in conversation with their friends" (2000, p. 218). The prevalent use of Singlish prompted the government to launch the "Speak Good English Movement" where Singaporeans are encouraged to use standard English and not Singlish (The Speak Good English Movement Committee, p. 2).

Features of the Chinese and Malay Students' Writing in English

The data is taken from assignments done by 28 Singaporean adult learners studying for a part-time diploma in a polytechnic in Singapore. Consisting mostly of technicians whose highest qualification in English is at the GCE'O' level, many of them find the learning of English challenging. For the assignment, they have to write their views on whether foetal stem cells from aborted or miscarried foetuses should be used to treat cancer patients. Out of the 28 students, 14 are Chinese and 14 are Malays. The influences of Chinese and Malay in their written work have been identified and classified as follows (the errors are underlined and omissions are indicated with brackets):

An Overview of the Features of the Chinese and Malay Students' Writing

Errors in the Chinese Students' Writing in English	***Errors in the Malay Students' Writing in English***
Verbal Inflexion (11)	Verbal Inflexion (16)
Plural Marking (11)	Plural Marking (13)
Passive form (10)	Passive form (3)
Articles (6)	Articles (3)
Pro-drop / Null-subject parameter (4)	Pro-drop / Null-subject parameter (2)
Adverbs / Adverbials (3)	Adverbs / Adverbials (0)
Object-preposing (2)	Object-preposing (1)

Features of the Chinese Students' Writing in English

Verbal Inflexion (11)

- This don't have to be a religious issue as the stem cells from the donor …
- If hospitals does not use the foetal stem cells …
- The writer argues that many childrens in the cancer ward is waiting indefinitely for cures to come.
- The writer argues that no woman will reject to donate her foetus if she know that …
- The Hippocratic oath which medical students take during graduation show that saving the lives of others is of the utmost mission in their profession.
- The writer argue that …
- The writer argue that …
- The writer argue that …
- The writer agree that …
- …this don't have to be a religious issue …
- The writer think that …

Plural Marking (11)

- The writer argued that since the embryos would be discarded after abortion or miscarriage, we can actually use these foetal stem cells to save some patients.
- … I am sure that all religion will support it.
- If hospitals does not use the foetal stem cells which would have been discarded for other purpose, then why not use it to save the lives of cancer patients.
- The writer argues that many childrens in the cancer ward …
- …many of them will lose their live in the end.
- Then hundred of peoples suffering from cancer will …
- …they can be the burdens to those people suffering from cancer …
- …to allow hospital to use foetal stem cells for saving the lives of patients suffering from cancer.
- …the writer argues that foetal stem cell from aborted or miscarried fetuses…
- …as these stem cell can save the life of hundred of patients suffering from cancer.
- I think those meant to be discarded embryo can put into good use.

Passive form (10)

- After all lives could be save …
- If the foetal stem cell is allowed to be use by the hospital …
- I think that when medicine and science to save lives is concern, …
- …then more lives will be save.
- …some of patients suffering from cancer can be save with stem cell transplants.
- I think that a woman who just had an abortion or miscarriage should ( ) told …
- If the use of such embryos can ( ) use for earning "profit", …
- Secondly the cells now available for research are likely to be reject by a patient's immune system.
- I think those meant to be discarded embryo can ( ) put into good use.

- …the mother should be briefed on how the cells would be use on other patients suffering from cancer …

Articles (6)

- If ( ) hospitals does not use the foetal stem cells …
- …some of ( ) patients suffering from cancer …
- …they can be the burdens to those people suffering from cancer …
- …then why not use a practical ways like …
- …I think that is a very good and meaningful for …
- We should give a suitable recipients a chance to …

Pro-drop / Null-subject parameter (4)

- But ( ) clearly works.
- ( ) Lead to social problems like illegal trading.
- …the cells would be use on other patients suffering from cancer and ( ) is not a profitable donation.
- Anyway this aim is noble, because ( ) is to save a life of someone dearly loved by his family and friends.

Adverbs / Adverbials (3)

- You sure see many innocent faces of young cancer patients …
- I will very agree.
- ..the ill practice already in use for many years now.

Object-preposing (2)

- As humans have children. They would want the next generation to have a future. If stem cells do not have the ability to cure cancer and it is not allowed to be in use.
- Since medical science is so close to a full solution to cancer by applying stem cell treatment.

Features of the Malay Students' Writing in English

Verbal Inflexion (16)

- The writer stress that she is not advocating …
- Other methods of saving cancer patient's life such as chemotherapy, radiotherapy and the latest treatment gene therapy has proved effective.
- The writer argues that she hope the relevant authorities would allow hospitals to …
- I am sure that there is other means of saving people's life.
- She suggest that …
- For those women who just had a miscarriage thinks that …
- At least there is efforts done on these patients.
- The writer claim that …
- I agree with what the writer have to say …
- I think that the writer do not give …

- I think that the way the writer write …
- I think that the way the writer write as if the embryos is just a "waste meat".
- Adult stem cells which requires no embryos …
- Adult stem cells which requires no embryos, is providing cures …
- These stem cells can be harvested from two sources which is from adult tissue …
- She have no valid proof or evidence to show that …

Plural Marking (13)

- I've thought carefully about the writer's view about using foetal stem cell from aborted or miscarried fetuses for treating cancer …
- The writer argues that doing a transplant using foetal stem cell could save the life of children and adults …
- Why couldn't they donate their adult stem cell …
- These are my reason for agreeing …
- Hundreds of children and adults were lying in hospitals wards hoping to be cure.
- …for example scientist from Harvard medical school have …
- …yet till this day an embryo stem cell have not helped a single patient.
- I am sure that there is other means of saving people's life.
- For those women who just had a miscarriage thinks that …
- These stem cells can save the lives of hundred of patient suffering from cancer.
- Many people die from cancer in every minutes.
- ….it can be use to save other and …
- For example India, people are selling their kidney for money.

Passive form (3)

- Hundreds of children and adults were lying in hospitals wards hoping to be cure.
- …as these stem cells can be use …
- So instead of discarding the embryos away, it can be use to …

Articles (2)

- I think that the problem is ( ) patient's immune system will probably reject stem cells from the embryos …
- The writer made the claim on ( ) assumption, not based on any proof to support the claim.

Pro-drop / Null-subject parameter (2)

- … by using foetal stem cells ( ) might cure the person.
- Thus ( ) help those who …

Object-preposing (1)

- For example India, people are selling their kidney for money.

Syntactic Features from the Chinese and Malay Students' Writing in English

VERBAL INFLEXION

This is the most prominent feature in the writings of both Chinese and Malay students. In Singlish, the verbs usually appear in an uninflected form where the singular present tense and past tense are not morphologically marked. This is due to influences from Chinese and Malay which do not have morphologically marked tense and agreement features (Platt and Weber, 1980; Alsagoff, 1998; 2001). For example,

Singlish
She eat rice.

Chinese
Ta chi fan.
She eat rice

Standard English
She eats rice.

Platt and Weber (1980) give the following example in the case of Malay (1980, p. 224, quoted in Alsagoff, 1998, p. 224):

Singlish
He go to market

Malay
Dia pergi ke pasar.

He go to market

Standard English
He is going to the market.

The fact that this is the most common error committed by both the Chinese and Malay students shows that their learning of English is heavily influenced by their respective mother tongues.

PLURAL MARKING

Another significant syntactic influence of Chinese and Malay is plural marking. Researchers note that most nouns in Singlish can be used both as count and non-count in Chinese and Malay (Alsagoff, 1998; Ho and Alsagoff, 1998; Ziegeler, 2003). Alsagoff gives the following examples (1998, p. 231):

Singlish
She bought four car.

Chinese
Ta mai le si liang che.
He/she buy four CLASSIFIER car

Malay
Dia mempunyai empat ekor kucing.
He/she own four CLASSIFIER cat

Standard English
She bought four cars.

In the case of Chinese, Tay explains these difficulties "may be attributed to the fact that in Chinese, nouns do not change their form according to whether they are singular or plural, verbs do not change their form according to tense" (1993, p. 62). Poedjosoedarmo also notes that plural marking is not obligatory in Malay, especially if the number of a noun is clear from the context or not important to the message; in fact, "excessive number marking in Malay is generally regarded as bad style" (2000, p. 214). A typical sentence written by a Malay student is as follows:

Singlish (Number Marking)
Formal Malay is also used during Malay debate and … religious speech.

Standard English
Formal Malay is also used during Malay debates and … religious speeches.

PASSIVES

The data shows that while both Chinese and Malay students have difficulty in the use of passives, more Chinese students (10 errors recorded) than Malay students (3 recorded) struggle with it. This is attested to by researchers note that there is a slightly greater use of passives among Malay pupils in comparison with their Chinese classmates (Yeo and Deterding, 2003, p. 82; Bao and Wee, 1999). In English, a passive sentence is constructed by putting the patient into the subject position and moving the agent to a post-verbal position preceded by the preposition "by". The structure of a Malay passive is quite similar to that in English, with "oleh" preceding the agent. Yeo and Deterding (2003, p. 82) give the following example:

Malay

Kereta	itu	akan	dibeli	oleh	Encik	Anwar	besok.
car	that	will	bought	by	Mr	Anwar	tomorrow

The car will be bought by Mr Anwar tomorrow.

However, this is not the case in Mandarin where passive sentences are rarely used. This is because the passive marker "bei" usually expresses some kind of adversity" (Li and Thompson 1981, 493, quoted in Yeo and Deterding, 2003, p. 78). For example, the following construction in Chinese, while acceptable, implies that the seller has been coerced to sell his car to Mr An.

Chinese

Ming-tian	che-zi	hui	bei	An	xian-sheng	mai.
tomorrow	car	will	by	An	Mr	buy

The car will be bought by Mr An tomorrow.

ARTICLES

As shown in the examples from the students' writings, the Chinese and Malay students either omit the use of articles, add superfluous articles or use them incorrectly. This is due to the fact that there are no exact equivalents in Malay and Chinese to the English definite and indefinite articles (Poedjosoedarmo, 2000, p. 213; Tay, 1993, p. 62). Poedjosoedarmo gives the following examples from her students' writing:

Singlish (Omission)
Malay language is my dominant language.

Standard English
The Malay language is my dominant language.

Singlish (Addition)
I used to write in casual language until I underwent a formal training.

Standard English
I used to write in casual language language until I underwent formal training.

The following example shows how the Chinese equivalent of the sentence does not involve the use of articles:

Singlish (Omission)
If ( ) hospitals do not collect ( ) fees …

Standard English
If the hospitals do not use the fees

Chinese

Ru guo	yi yuan	mei you	shou fen …
If	hospitals	do not	collect fees

PRO-DROP

In standard English, the subject of a finite clause cannot be omitted. However, Singlish is null subject due to influence from Chinese. By referring to a study of the top 100 wordforms in the British and Singaporean corpora (ICE-GB, ICE-SIN), researchers found that the pronoun "I" has a relatively low occurrence in ICE-SIN. An example is this sentence (ICE-SIN-S1b-012, quoted in Ni and Ler, 2000, p. 165):

Singlish
"Will inform you if anything happens"

Standard English
I will inform you if anything happens.

Ni and Ler explain that this is due to "the subject-dropping commonly practiced by Singaporean English speakers, a phenomenon influenced by the Chinese dialects used widely in Singapore" (2000, p. 165). Such omission of the grammatical subject of a finite clause is due to the belief among speakers of SCE that the subject is easily retrievable from the context (Gupta 1994, pp. 10-11). For example, the sentence "It is thundering" is simply "da lei le" ("Thundering") in Chinese (Gupta 1994, p. 10). Alsagoff (1998), Gupta (1994), Platt and Weber (1980), Poon (1997), Tay (1978; 1968) and Leong (2003) have all noticed this pro-drop feature in Singlish. This explains why the Chinese students tend to commit this error and why more Chinese students than Malay students omit the subject in their sentences. However, a possible reason why some Malay students also commit this error is that they pick up this usage from their frequent interaction with their Chinese colleagues and classmates.

OBJECT-PREPOSING

Learners in Singapore tend to prepose the object so that the sentence has an Object-Subject-Verb word order. This is influenced by Chinese which is a topic-prominent language in which the topic determines a sentence structure (Schachter and Rutherford, 1979; Alsagoff, 1998; Deterding, 2000; Li and Thompson, 1981; Shi, 2000; Tan, 1999). Tan (2003) and Poedjosoedarmo (2000) also note that Malay is a topic-prominent language and this influences the English used in Singapore. Below is an example to show the influence of Chinese on Singlish:

Singlish
Certain medicine we don't stock in our dispensary.

Chinese
You xie yao wo men bu shou zai wo men de yau fang li.
Certain medicine we don't stock in our dispensary

Standard English
We don't stock certain medicine in our dispensary.

ADVERBS / ADVERBIALS

While there are 3 instances where the Chinese students use the adverbs incorrectly, this is not a problem for the Malay students. This disparity is due to the different sentence structures of Chinese and Malay as compared to that of English. For Chinese but not Malay, the adverb must always occur before the verb (Li and Thompson 1981, p. 22). So in the example the student places "sure" before the verb "see", he is simply following the Chinese style where the word "yi ting" (sure) must come before "kan dao" (see):

Singlish
You sure see many innocent faces …

Chinese
Ni yi ting kan dao hen duo tian zhen de nian kong …

You sure see many innocent faces

The same explanation applies to adverbials. Both English and Malay allow adverbials of time and place to occur in initial or final position but Chinese mostly requires them to occur before the verb (Li and Thompson, 1981, 22). Yeo and Deterding note that Malay students tend to use more post-verbal use of adverbials of place than their Chinese classmates (2003, p. 80). The Malay learner is able to transfer his knowledge of Malay to help him or her to place the adverbial of time after the verb. On the other hand, a Chinese learner will find that his knowledge of Chinese has interfered with his learning of English as he or she may place the adverbial of time before the verb. For example,

Singlish
He this morning arrived.

Standard English
He arrived this morning.

Chinese
Ta jin-tian zao-shang dao-le.
He today morning arrive

Malay
Dia tiba pagi ini.
He arrive morning this

Another influence of Chinese is the frequent use of adverbials such as "already" and "always" to express the perfective aspect in English (Bao, 1995; Alsagoff, 1980). The use of "already" is due to the influence of Chinese where "le" is used to mark completion in a sentence (Platt and Weber, 1980, Egerod, 1994). For example,

Singlish
My father pass away already.

Chinese
Wo de pa pa qu shi le.

My father pass away already

Standard English
My father has passed away.

Likewise, the ubiquitous use of "always" is due to the Chinese word "chang", as seen in the example below:

Singlish
My father always exercise everyday.

Chinese
Wo de pa pa mei tian chang chang yun dong.

My father everyday always exercise

Standard English
My father exercises everyday.

Other Syntactic Features from the Chinese and Malay Students' Writing in English

Besides the features highlighted above which are gleaned from the assignments of 28 polytechnic students, there are other syntactic influences of Chinese and Malay on the students' learning of English in schools. The following features have been pointed out by other researchers based on their study in Singapore schools.

REDUPLICATION

Khairiah (1985) observes that a number of reduplicated words in Singlish are derived from Chinese and Malay, such as "agak-agak" (estimate) and "jalan-jalan" (walk) from Malay, "kapo kapo" (busybody), "pang pang" (fat) and "bei bei" (recite/memorise" from Chinese (p. 27, quoted in Lim, 1997, p. 61). Lim explains that reduplication is influenced by the students' mother tongues:

> In Malay, verbs can be reduplicated in the following way: *muntah* 'to vomit' into *muntah-muntah* 'to keep on vomiting', showing a repetitive and continuous action. .... Whereas Malay reduplicated verbs to show repetition, continuation, or generality of an action, verbs in Mandarin Chinese, especially volitional verbs, get reduplicated to signal delimitive aspect. As explained by Li and Thompson (1981, p.29), this means that "reduplication of an action verb has the semantic effect of signaling that the actor is doing something 'a little bit'. One such example is the volitional verb *chang* 'taste' which becomes *chang-chang* 'taste a little' when reduplicated (1997, p. 76).

WH INTERROGATIVE CONSTRUCTION

In Singlish, the interrogative pronoun which is the wh- pronoun can remain in situ due to influence from Chinese (Alsagoff, 1998; Gupta, 1994; Tay, 1978). For example (Alsagoff, 1998, p. 242)

> Singlish
> He take what?

Chinese
Ta na le shen-me?
He/she take what

Standard English
What did she take?

CONNECTIVES

Chinese students also face a difficulty in the use of correlated connectives. A common error is the use of "because" and "therefore" in the same sentence. This is due to the fact that Chinese tends to mark two clauses in a sentence with a connector: yin-wei …suo-yi ('because … therefore') (Deterding, p. 206). For example,

Singlish
Because I woke up late, therefore I was late.

Standard English
I was late because I woke up late. OR
I woke up late therefore I was late.

Chinese
Yin wei wo zhi qi, suo yi wo zhi dao

Because I woke up late therefore I late.

VERBS OF SAYING

Ho notes that verbs of saying in Singlish have the following serial verb structure, which is also found in Chinese (2000, p. 193): Verb + (Noun Phrase) + say. For example,

Singlish
I argue say, 'I came in before nine.'

Standard English
I argued that I came in well before nine.

That this pattern is influenced by Chinese is pointed out by Li and Thompson (1981), Xu and Langendoen (1985). Take the following examples:

Chinese
Ta gaosu wo shuo ni tout eng.
He/she tell me say you headache

Standard English
He/she told me that you had a headache.

Implications and Conclusion

The overt influences of Chinese and Malay on the students' learning of English indicate that language teachers need to take into consideration such influences in their teaching. There is a need for language teachers to take careful stock of the transfer and interference of the students' mother tongues in the students' writing and speaking. The tendency among English teachers in Singapore is to teach without considering the learning difficulties faced by students in Singapore. Chia explains that "despite efforts being made to re-train teachers in making grammar learning occur in meaningful contexts, a substantial number still choose to cling on to their traditional way of teaching by drilling their students to memorise grammar rules" (Chia, 2003, p. 126). Therefore the Singapore English Language teachers need to be challenged to reflect on their teaching practices and engage in innovative practices (Ng and Farrell, 2003, p. 136). Richards and Tay emphasise the attitude that the language teacher should have:

> The attitude of the English language teacher is important in the Singapore context. He or she should be aware of the great amount of "lectal switching" that goes on all the time. He will not therefore condemn expressions like "Stop shaking legs and get back to work la" as substandard but consider its appropriateness in terms of the formality of the situation (it would be appropriate for a Singaporean to talk to another Singaporean like that but not to a foreigner), and the media (it would be appropriate in speech under certain conditions but never in writing) (1981, p. 55).

There are some specific ways for language teachers to help students correct the errors. One way to highlight the influences of the mother tongues on the students' learning of English is to collect these errors and ask the students to analyse the errors. Ho (2004) has devised a 3-step approach

to error definition, classification and explanation for Singapore students. Teachers who have students of different races may wish to implement communicative activities by regrouping them so that everyone can communicate with people of other races. For example, a Chinese learner who tends to place the adverbs and adverbials before the verbs will learn from his or her Malay counterpart how to use adverbs and adverbials correctly. Thirdly, the teacher could tap on the students' mother tongues to teach English effectively to them. It is germane to note that the influences of the learners' mother tongues may not be necessarily negative. Writers like Taylor (1975), McLaughlin (1978), Corder (1981), Krashen (1981) and Ard and Homburg (1983; 1992) have argued that the learners can use the first language as prior knowledge to facilitate the developmental process of learning English. Referring to the case of Chinese learners, Kirkpatrick writes,

> In the context of L1 transfer into regional varieties of English, however, we argue that it might be more appropriate for a regional variety of English to present information in the way that Chinese prefers rather than in the way a native speaking variety of English does. Speakers of a regional variety of English are unlikely to stereotype the Chinese preferred sequence as representing a difficulty in getting to the point. It may actually represent an appropriate way of presenting information or an argument (Kirkpatrick, 2000, p. 65).

Despite the clear influences of Chinese and Malay on the learning of English for Singapore learners, it is important to note that there are other factors that influence the process of acquisition, such as "innate principles of language, attitude, motivation, aptitude, age, other languages known and so forth" (Gass and Selinker, 2001, p. 76). A number of studies have been conducted to identify these additional factors (for example, see Anderson, 1983; Eckman, 1984; Flynn, 1983; 1986, Wode, 1984; Zobl, 1982). In the case of learners in Singapore, not all errors in Singlish are attributed to the influences of the students' mother tongues. Thomas notes that "speakers of other languages learn English irrespective of whether these other languages themselves mark verbs according to subject" (1996, p. 227, quoted in Alsagoff, 1998, p. 225). The language teacher should therefore be aware of the cross-linguistic influences of Chinese and Malay in the students' learning of English while constantly look into other possible factors which may impede the students' learning, and adopt the appropriate teaching methods to help students learn.

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