

Spelling Errors in the Essay Writing of Malay Language by Lun Bawang Ethnic Students

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i4/24974> DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i4/24974

Published Online: 31 December 2024

Abstract

This study aims to identify common spelling mistakes made by Lun Bawang students. Data was collected through the analysis of 52 essays by level 2 students from a rural school in Lawas District, Sarawak state. The essays were analysed using the Content Analysis method. The findings reveal a total of 198 spelling mistakes, including the addition, deletion, and replacement of letters in both derived and base words. Additionally, the study found that students often confuse words that should be spelled together or separately, show insensitivity to the use of uppercase and lowercase letters, and mix up the letters 'b' and 'd'. The study suggests several strategies to reduce spelling errors in students' writing.

Keywords: Malay Language Writing, Lun Bawang Ethnicity, Spelling Mistake

Introduction

Malay, as the National Language of Malaysia, is officially recognized through Article 152 of the Federal Constitution. This article not only affirms its role as the official language of the country, but also as the language of knowledge and the medium of instruction in schools. The Language and Library Council (DBP) has been given the responsibility to plan, research, and strengthen the Malay Language in Malaysia. One of the main efforts in strengthening the Malay Language is through the planning of a language corpus that involves the spelling, writing, and vocabulary systems. In the context of education, the Primary School Malay Language Curriculum and Assessment Standard Document (DSKP) outlines several important aspects of writing skills. Among them are, i) writing grammatical sentences, ii) using correct punctuation and spelling, iii) using clear and neat writing. However, studies show that spelling errors are an issue that students often face in writing Malay essays. This problem does not only occur among non-native speakers of Malay, but also among native speakers themselves. Common spelling errors include adding, dropping, and replacing letters in loanwords, base words, and derived words. Studies conducted in several schools in Malaysia also found that students are often confused in spelling that should be written close or apart, as well as the incorrect use of uppercase and lowercase letters. These errors can affect the reader's understanding of the message being conveyed and indicate weaknesses in students' mastery of basic writing. Therefore, it is important for teachers to give more emphasis to the teaching and learning of these aspects, especially in teaching correct spelling and grammatical writing,

to improve students' writing skills. More focused efforts in overcoming this problem will help students improve their mastery of writing and subsequently strengthen the use of Malay in daily life.

Problem Statement

The use of correct spelling is an important foundation in writing Malay essays. Correct spelling helps readers understand the writer's intent clearly. Spelling errors can change the meaning of a sentence and cause confusion. Correct spelling helps in forming sentence and paragraph structures, making writing easier to read and follow. Correct spelling increases the credibility of the writer, as readers are more likely to appreciate neat and orderly writing. However, Lun Bawang ethnic students face difficulties in mastering this aspect. Inaccurate spelling errors in writing can interfere and make it difficult for readers to understand. Spelling errors include adding, deleting and replacing letters in unnecessary words, as well as incorrect use of uppercase and lowercase letters are also often found in students' writing.

Previous studies have also shown that spelling errors are a common problem faced by students learning Malay as a second language. A study by Anne Jeffrey and Saidatul Nornis (2020) in the Tuaran district, Sabah, showed that secondary school students often make spelling errors in their essay writing, including adding, deleting and replacing letters in loanwords, base words, and derived words. A study conducted by Abdul Rashid Jamian (2011) showed that students who learn Malay as a second language face difficulties in aspects of writing such as recognizing uppercase and lowercase letters, using punctuation marks, and correct sentence structure. The findings of studies by Alhaadi and Zaitul Azma (2018), Nur Eliani and Che Ibrahim (2017) and Wan Muna et al. (2018), found that non-native speakers often make grammatical errors when writing essays, especially in the aspect of affixation. Zamri et al. (2010) in their study also stated that writing, whether in their mother tongue or in a second language, is a challenge. For Lun Bawang ethnic students, this challenge is more pronounced because they need to master Malay as a second or third language.

Therefore, this study should be conducted to help teachers improve teaching strategies and provide additional support to help students overcome difficulties in writing Malay. Mastering the Malay language subject is important because it is a mandatory requirement to pass examinations, especially in the Academic Session Final Examination (UASA), the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) and the Malaysian Higher Education Certificate (STPM). Good results in these examinations are a prerequisite for continuing their studies to higher levels such as matriculation, diploma, and degree. Without passing the Malay language subject, students do not obtain the certificates required to continue their studies at colleges, specialized schools, and institutions of higher learning. Rozana Jaafar and Zamri Mahamod (2020) in their study found that excellent students use various learning strategies to master Malay language writing skills at a high level. This shows that mastery of writing skills is important for achieving academic excellence.

This study also aims to identify the types of spelling errors that Lun Bawang ethnic students often make in writing Malay language essays. Finally, this study suggests more effective teaching and learning strategies to reduce spelling errors in the writing of Lun Bawang ethnic students' essays, including a more inclusive and sensitive teaching approach to the students' linguistic background.

Theoretical Framework

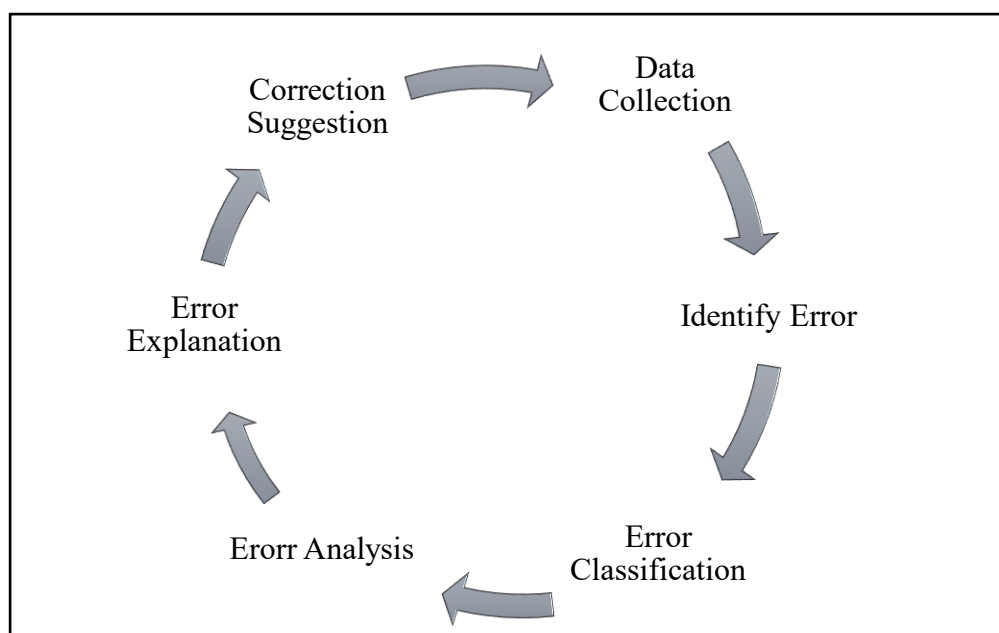


Figure 1: Theoretical Research Framework

(Source: Adaptation of Corder's Error Analysis Theory, 1973)

In this study, the researcher collected samples of essay writing from Lun Bawang ethnic students from classes taught by the researcher himself. The collected essays covered a variety of topics and different lengths of essays. The collection of these essay samples was to identify the types of spelling errors found in the students' writing which were then categorized into errors in adding, deleting, and replacing letters in root words and derived words, the use of uppercase and lowercase letters, and confusion in using the letters 'b' and 'd'. The analysis of the classified errors made it easier for the researcher to understand the cause of the errors. In the last step, the researcher will explain the errors made by the students by suggesting correction strategies to help the students correct the errors.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research approach using content analysis. The study was conducted at a secondary school in the Lawas district, Sarawak, where the majority of the students are Lun Bawang ethnic. The study sample consisted of 25 male and 27 female students in secondary school. In this study, data was obtained from the essays of 52 students and analysed manually. The title of the essays for the review type and the essays for the story type were the same for all students to facilitate the identification of errors made.

Discussion and Result of the Study

Demographics of Level Two Students

In this study, a total of 52 Lun Bawang ethnic students consisting of level two students were selected as study participants. A total of 12 students from year four, 25 students from year five and 15 students from year six. All students were selected as study participants because they were from the Lun Bawang ethnic group and studied in the same school, which was a school with fewer students.

Table 1

Study Participants by class, age, and gender Spelling errors in Malay essay writing by Lun Bawang Ethnic Students

CLASS	AGE	GENDER		TOTAL
		Male	Female	
Year 4	10 years	7	5	12
Year 5	11 years	9	16	25
Year 6	12 years	9	6	15
Total		25	27	52

Table 2

Addition of Letters

Word classes	Example Errors	Correction	Frequency
Imbuhan	kebanyakkan	kebanyakan	5
	kerosakkan	kerosakan	5
	berkerjasama	bekerjasama	4
	berkhelah	berkelah	3
Penanda wacana	senterusnya	seterusnya	1
Kata dasar	cendera	cedera	1
	setiyap masa....	setiap	3
	jaduwal	jadual	3
	pulah	pula	1
Frequency			26 (13%)

Referring to Table 2, the total number of errors involving the addition of letters was 26 (13%) of the data identified from the work of 52 respondents. Based on the table, respondents added a 'k' to the root words 'banyak' and 'rosak' which use the suffix 'ke-...an'. This error occurred because students did not understand the concept of the suffix 'ke-...-an' which only has 'ke-..' and '...-an', instead of 'ke-...' and '...-kan'. In addition, attention also needs to be paid to the spelling of the word 'bekerjasama' which is often spelled as 'berkerjasama'. According to the law of derivational verb formation, if the prefix 'ber-' is used, the word is spelled as 'bekerjasama'. In the Kamus Dewan Fourth Edition (2007), the word 'berkerjasama' does not exist and does not give the correct meaning. Therefore, the correct spelling for 'kerjasama' using the prefix 'ber-' is 'be-'. Students also make spelling mistakes in basic words by adding letters to words that should not be needed in writing. The words 'cedera', 'setiap' and 'jadual' are spelled as 'cendera', 'setiyap' and 'jaduwal'. These spelling mistakes are the influence of the oral language system which causes students to spell according to the pronunciation.

Table 3

Letter loss

Word classes	Example Errors	Correction	Frequency
Imbuhan	mengelola	mengelakkan	4
	...mentunjukkan tentang cara...	menunjukkan	3
	masukan	masukkan	3
	letak	letakkan	3
	dipelajar	dipelajari	4
	selepa	selepas	1
	kemah	khemah	4
	memhami	memahami	2
Kata dasar	eletrik	elektirk	2
	gebur	gembur	2
	bertanyakan kabar	khabar	3
	akhir sekali	akhir	4
	tentang	tentang	2
	bayak	banyak	2
Kata penekan/ pembenda '-nya'	kawan-kawanya	kawan-kawannya	4
	kesimpulanya	kesimpulannya	3
	denganya	dengannya	3

Frequency**49 (25%)**

Table 3 shows 49 (25%) total errors in root words and affixed words. Students spelled the words 'menunjukkan' and 'mengelola' as 'mentunjukkan' and 'mengelola'. According to the law of derivational verb formation, there are four variant forms for the affix 'men-...-kan'. This variant will change based on the first letter of the root word it is combined with. For example, root words that begin with the letters 'kh', 'h', 'g' and 'gh', as well as vowel sounds such as the vowel 'e' in the root word 'elak' use the variant form 'meng-...-kan' instead of 'men-...-kan'. Therefore, the omission of one of the letters 'k' in the word 'mengelola' is wrong and should be retained. Then for root words that begin with the letters 'k', 'p', 's' and 't' will change to other letters with the same area of articulation. For example, the letter 't' in the root word 'tunjuk' is written as 'menunjukkan' instead of 'mentunjukkan' because the letters 'n' and 't' belong to the same articulation area as the letters 'm' and 'p'.

Next, the words 'kawan-kawanya', 'kesimpulanya', and 'denganya' should be spelled as 'kawan-kawannya', 'kesimpulannya', and 'dengannya' because 'nya' only functions as a declension or stress word rather than referring to any affixed word. Therefore, words ending in the letter 'n' when combined with the stress word 'nya' will retain the last letter of the root word without removing it.

Spelling errors involving the omission of letters also occur in the writing of root words such as 'eletrik', 'gebur', 'kabar', 'kemah' and 'akhir'. Spelling errors occur in the words 'kabar', 'kemah' and 'akhir' due to the adaptation of consonant letters that combine 'gh', 'kh', 'ng', 'ny' and 'sy'. Therefore, the root words should be spelled as 'khabar', 'khemah' and 'akhir', rather than spelled according to pronunciation. Meanwhile, the words 'eletrik' and 'gebur' should

be spelled as 'elektrik' and 'gembur'. Using the correct spelling is important to ensure accuracy and understanding in writing.

Table 4

Letter substitution

Word classes	Example Errors	Correction	Frequency
Imbuhan	....tanpa menyadari....	menyedari	2
	....menggunakan pakayan yang bersih.	pakaian	3
	....mengusun makanan yang dibawa....	menyusun	2
	.....tempat yang selesa untuk berahat.....	berehat	2
Kata dasar	grafit menunjukkan....	grafik	2
	...memotong rumbut....	rumput	1
	...halaman menjadi cantek....	cantik	1
	...badan yang sehat....	sihat	1
	...menjadi murid cermelang....	cemerlang	8
	mersa	mesra	3
	seliwar	seluar	1
	murit	murid	2
	...hari saptu yang lalu....	Sabtu	2
	...bermain balon air....	belon	1
	...tempat yang selisa untuk...	selesa	1
	...menaiki kereta....	kereta	2
	...bermain bersama rakan-sakan	rakan-rakan	1
	Setelah berehat setetika.....	seketika	2
	...tampa menyedari....	tanpa	2
Frequency			39 (20%)

In terms of letter substitution, there were 39 (20%) errors identified. For example, the word 'menyedari' was spelled as 'menyadari' by replacing the letter 'e' with 'a'. Similarly, the word 'pakaian' was spelled as 'pakayan' by replacing the letter 'i' with 'y'. In addition, the substitution of the position of the letter 'r' in the words 'cermelang' and 'mersa' which should be spelled as 'cemerlang' and 'mesra' resulted in spelling errors.

Interestingly, students spelled the word 'seluar' as 'seliwar' according to their daily pronunciation. However, this error only occurred among year 4 students and one year 6 student. Spelling words according to pronunciation made this error more likely to occur. In addition, weaknesses in mastering vowel harmony resulted in students making errors by replacing letters in the words they spelled. For example, words such as 'sehat' and 'cantek' should be spelled as 'sihat' and 'cantik' according to the vowel pattern 'e-i'. Similarly, the word 'belon' is spelled as 'balon' due to confusion over the vowel sound 'e-a'.

Table 5

Spelling errors due to being written separately

Word classes	Errors Example	Correction	Frequency
Kata kerja pasif 'di'	....makanan yang di bawa dari rumah	dibawa	6
	... di tarik menggunakan	ditarik	1
	...menggunakan tali yang di beri....	diberi	1
Kata terbitan	...ibu bapa bertanggung jawab....	bertanggungjawab	3
Kata sendi	dari pada	daripada	4
	ke pada		1
Frequency			16 (8%)

Table 6

Spelling errors due to writing close

Word classes	Errors Example	Correction	Frequency
Kata sendi nama 'di'	Disamping itu	Di samping itu	5
Kata kerja awalan 'meN'	mengulangkaji pelajaran	mengulang kaji	4
Kata majmuk	ibubapa	ibu bapa	10
	tengahari	tengah hari	12
Frequency			31(16%)

Based on the study findings as shown in the table, students had difficulty in writing words that required them to determine whether the word should be spelled as a string or separated. In Table 5 and Table 6, the total number of errors identified was 16 errors (8%) and 31 errors (16%). These errors showed students' confusion about spelling rules, especially in the context of words that should be written as a single word or two separate words. In addition, correct spelling rules require students to understand word categories such as suffixed affixes, compound words, and the preposition 'di'. For example, the word 'ibu bapa', should be written separately, but students tend to write it as 'ibubapa'. Similarly, the words 'mengulang kaji', 'di samping itu', and 'tengah hari' also experienced similar spelling errors, where students wrote as a single word which should be two separate words. The study findings also show that words such as 'daripada', 'kepada', 'dibawa', 'ditarik', 'bertanggungjawab', and 'diberi' are written as two separate words by students, even though they should be written as a single word according to correct spelling rules.

According to Nik Safiah et.al (2011), a noun phrase is a structure consisting of one or more words that function as a unit in a sentence, and usually refers to things, places, people and animals. In the formation of a noun phrase, there is a relationship between the words that form it. For example, the phrase 'ibu bapa' is a noun phrase that contains two core elements that have different meanings. Therefore, this phrase is considered a combination of

two stand-alone words, namely 'ibu' and 'bapa'. In this context, both words should be spelled separately because each word represents a different individual. These errors indicate that there is confusion in students' understanding of correct spelling, which requires correction and emphasis in teaching correct spelling, especially related to the spelling rules for compound and separated words. Apart from that, students also need to know and understand about writing compound words that are spelled separately or in a series. Based on the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP), there are 15 compound words that need to be spelled in a series because of their well-established form (Nik Safiah et.al., 2011). The exceptions for these 15 words, namely as *kerjasama*, *bumiputera*, *kakitangan*, *suruhanjaya*, *sukarela*, *pesuruhjaya*, *antarabangsa*, *olahraga* and *beritahu* can confuse language users. The word 'daripada' is not a compound word but belongs to the preposition and needs to be spelled close. The spelling 'daripada' when separated will carry two different prepositional meanings, namely 'dari' and 'pada'.

Next, understanding the use of the preposition 'di' in words requires knowing its use. For example, the basic words 'bawa', 'tarik', and 'beri' which use the preposition 'di' as found in the table. In word formation, when the prefix 'di-' is combined with a verb, it will form a passive verb such as the word 'tarik' becomes 'ditarik'. Therefore, any verb when combined with the prefix 'di' needs to be spelled as a series. Groups of words other than verbs that receive the prefix 'di-' need to be written separately such as 'di pantai' indicating a place noun, and 'di sana' indicating a demonstrative pronoun. Thus, in using the preposition 'di-', students need to understand and identify whether the word combined with the prefix is a verb or a word referring to position and place. Thus, spelling errors whether written separately or close together when using the preposition 'di-' will be avoided.

Table 7

Use of uppercase and lowercase letter

Error Type	Errors Example	Frequency
Tidak menulis huruf besar pada perkataan awal ayat / perenggan	kesimpulannya, di samping itu, seterusnya	4
Tidak menulis huruf besar pada perkataan selepas noktah	....bermain bola sepak. ada juga yang....	4
Tidak menulis huruf besar pada kata nama khas	sungai punang trusan, sabtu, jovian dan kawan-kawannya..., proton waja	13
Menulis huruf besar pada perkataan yang bukan kata nama khas yang terletak pada pertengahan ayat	...tidak Boleh berebut-rebut..... ...mestilah Berwaspada dengan orang yang tidak dikenali.....	4
Number of errors		25 (13%)

Based on the analysis, students were found to be less sensitive and confused in using uppercase and lowercase letters in writing. Among the errors identified was using lowercase letters at the beginning of a sentence or paragraph. For example, the use of discourse markers such as 'Kesimpulannya', 'Di samping itu', and 'Seterusnya' begins with lowercase letters. In writing, each new paragraph must begin with a sentence whose first word is capitalized. This error often occurs because students do not understand the correct paragraph structure and are not aware of the importance of using capital letters to start a paragraph. The same applies

when starting a new sentence after a period. Based on Table 6, students use lowercase letters at the beginning of words even after a period. This error is caused by students' lack of attention when writing and has become a bad habit in writing.

Next is the error of using lowercase letters in proper nouns such as names of people, places, things, and animals. In the table, the proper nouns 'Sungai Punang Trusan' (proper noun of a place), 'Jovian' (proper noun of a person), 'Proton Waja' (proper noun of a thing) are written using lowercase letters. This error recorded the highest number of errors, which was 13 errors. It occurred most frequently among year 4 students. This error occurred because students had not mastered the difference between common nouns and proper nouns, which affected their ability to write correctly. This confusion caused students to not realize that proper nouns require capital letters to show the uniqueness and specificity of the word. With a deeper understanding of this rule and consistent practice, mastery of the use of uppercase and lowercase letters in writing can be improved.

Table 8

Confusion in the use of the letters 'b' and 'd'

Errors Example	Correction	Frequency
delon	belon	3
dermain	bermain	2
sebang	sedang	3
balam	dalam	2
Paba	pada	2
Number of errors		12 (6%)

Students' weakness in distinguishing the letters 'b' and 'd' in writing is a frequent problem, especially for students who have not yet fully mastered reading skills. Students' difficulty in recognizing the letters 'b' and 'd' is because the visual shape of the letters is almost similar, causing confusion. Based on the table, it can be identified that every word that uses the letters 'b' and 'd' is written upside down. For example, the letter 'b' in the word 'belon' is replaced with the letter 'd', and the letter 'd' in the word 'sedang' is replaced with the letter 'b'. This situation shows significant confusion among students. Therefore, teachers need to plan appropriate strategies and approaches to help students identify the differences between the two letters.

Implications of the Study

The study on spelling errors in Malay essay writing by Lun Bawang ethnic students has broad and important implications. For teachers, the findings of the study help identify errors that are often made by students and then design more effective teaching methods. Teachers can also use this information to improve teaching strategies to meet the needs of students that lead to a more inclusive approach. Students will also benefit from more specific feedback on spelling errors made, which in turn improves the quality of writing. In addition, it is hoped that the findings of this study will help researchers to conduct further research in the field of Malay language teaching and learning, especially for ethnic minorities. In conclusion, this study contributes to efforts to improve teachers' teaching practices and students' Malay language learning to support more inclusive and effective educational progress for Lun Bawang ethnic students.

Conclusion

Overall, this study examines spelling errors in Malay writing by Lun Bawang ethnic students which include adding, deleting, and replacing letters in derived words and base words. Students are often found to add unnecessary letters, as well as omitting important letters in words. In addition, there are also letter substitution errors where students replace certain letters with letters that have almost the same sound. Confusion in using uppercase and lowercase letters, as well as the letters 'b' and 'd', cause spelling errors to occur in writing. Although the words spelled seem easy, spelling errors made by students cannot be avoided and are difficult to correct because they have become a habit.

Therefore, to overcome this problem, regular spelling exercises need to be carried out to strengthen students' memory of correct spelling. Individual guidance for students who often make spelling errors can help students understand the cause of the error. In addition, teachers can provide fun language games that can attract students' interest in learning and reinforcing correct spelling. The hope of this study is to provide a clear picture of several spelling errors often made by Lun Bawang ethnic students. By understanding the causes and types of these errors, it is hoped that schools, especially teachers, can plan more effective teaching strategies to correct students' spelling errors. It is also hoped that this study can be used as a reference by researchers in the field of language education.

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