

AN ANALYSIS ON THE MASTERY OF UPPERCASE AND LOWERCASE LETTERS IN NOUNS AMONG NON-NATIVE SPEAKER STUDENTS

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Abstract

A student's skill in constructing outstanding grammatical writing starts from the skill of writing a sentence mechanically as well as the ability to revise and refine paragraphs in the aspect of spellings, correct punctuation, the use of remuneration, appropriate utilization of words and the structure of sentences. This study focuses on mastering the use of uppercase and lowercase letters in common nouns and proper nouns among SJKT students. The respondents were 55 students of Year 5 from Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil Kajang. This study is based on a qualitative approach. In order to acquire data, researcher used text analysis, observations, and interviews. Data were analysed using Corder Language Error Analysis (1981). Findings showed that 97% of uppercase errors in proper nouns and the students are still less familiar with the common nouns as a second language speaker of Malay. Misconceptions in common nouns and proper nouns tend to use the wrong letters in writing. Therefore, all language users are advised to emphasize the proper usage of common and proper nouns to construct grammar sentences free of mechanical error.

Key Word: noun, uppercase, lowercase, Malay, writing, mechanical error

Introduction

Malay is the national language and portrays the identity of Malaysian citizens, regardless of nation and religion. In accordance with Article 152 of the Federal Constitution, the Education Act 1996, Malay language has been assigned as a core subject in all schools and educational institutions in an effort to improve the position of Malays in society. Globalization, being a dynamic movement, necessitates curriculum modifications in the realm of education. Thus, the Standard School Curriculum (KSSR) has been steadily implemented since 2011. In an effort to improve the quality of the curriculum in primary schools corresponding to international standards, the KSSR has been revised under the Education Development Plan Malaysia (PPPM) 2013-2025. The Application of the Curriculum and Testing Standard Document (DSKP) has begun for all subjects at all levels.

The DSKP emphasizes three basic skills to be mastered in language teaching and learning, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. In considering the student's achievement of each language skill stated, the level of student mastery is assessed by a number of 1 to 6. This evaluation is based on the Classroom Assessment (PBD), which emphasizes skill-based learning above summative assessment. The goal of this strategy is to shape students toward the acquisition of 21st-century skills.

The DSKP outlines a language system comprised of grammar, spelling systems, designations and intonations, words, and phrases that a student should master in order to

effectively use and practice the standard Malay language. In addition, the group of words consisting of nouns, verbs, adjectives and conjunctions are included in the list. In order to ensure the effectiveness of accurately conveying messages and meanings, it is crucial to master the reading of signs such as full stops, commas, semicolons, colons, hyphens, question marks, exclamation marks, quotation marks, parentheses, including lowercase, uppercase, and italic.

Therefore, the effort to develop students who are skilled in writing starts from the outstanding skill of writing a sentence mechanically, as well as the ability to revise and refine paragraphs in the aspect of spelling, correct punctuation, the use of remuneration, utilization of words, and the structure of sentences. Hence, educators should prioritize these skills in order to raise generations who are capable of communicating effectively and consistently, meanwhile, students should be able to construct sentences correctly by knowing language systems that span morphology and syntax.

Problem Statement

Although the Lower School Examination Test (UPSR) has been abolished, it is still used as an element in the Low School Reporting Report (PPSR), which was introduced since 2018. The major goal of PPSR practise is to understand all students' performances holistically, rather than simply academically by attaining grade A in all subjects. As a result, language skills are still assessed based on listening and speaking, reading, and writing skills as listed and explained in the DSKP. However, according to PPSR data from 2018 and 2019 (Malaysian Ministry of Education, 2019), the percentage of non-Malay language speakers attaining grades A and B is lower compared to those with grades C and D. While students who fail in writing are still in 12 to 13 percent of the total. This indicates that non-native Malay language students continue to struggle with writing skills, particularly in Malay. According to Angela and Zamri (2019) and Savitry and Norasmah (2022), the ability of a person to understand a language that is not commonly used in everyday life is a huge challenge and has a significant effect on academic progress. However, the issue of students' inability to produce decent work and failure to construct a sentence despite having learned the language for a long period of time is also disputed by a group of educators. Furthermore, students' misunderstanding and less-prioritizing attitude toward the correct use of large and small letters may contribute to poor writing skills, even though the use of letters has been implemented in language learning based on the Curriculum Standard Document, and the Penalties. (2019). Most previous studies, such as Wafiqah Asnola et al. (2022), Aman Shah et al. (2021), Ugartini et al. (2021), and Isabella Jali (2021), have found significant proves of mistakes in the use of spelling errors, that has been done by high school and university students. On top of that, the ability of students who are less skilled in both small and large letters result them in wrongly distinguishing between common and proper nouns. Students do not properly understand the notion of nouns, nor can they differentiate between the usage of large and small letters in a sentence. Subsequently, this issue will have unsatisfactory impacts in terms of scoring aspects of the Malay language (Usha et al., 2022). Students are unable to generate effective writing due to inadequate exposure to the use of large and small letters as well as the correct concepts of nouns. This is due to the lack

of knowledge of vocabulary. Thus, this study focuses on the mastery of fundamental writing skills, especially by evaluating the understanding of non-native students of the use of large and small letters in common and proper nouns.

Literature Review

A study done by Ahmed Hafizainol and Karim Harun (2020) showed that the mastery of Malay as a second language among non-native speakers is quite poor in terms of writing skills. The common usage of the intralingual becomes one of the factors that causes students to struggle to understand when learning a second language. This is proven by a student's work that is defective in terms of morphological, syntactical, and orthographic components. The research findings also showed that almost half of the students are very poor at understanding common and proper nouns, especially in differentiating between their usage. Furthermore, Nurul Ain and Nik Nur Athirah (2021) discovered morphological and orthographic errors that were very significant in the writing of students who studied Malay as a second language in their research. Orthographical errors include spelling errors, uppercase and lowercase errors and loanword errors. Students cannot comprehend the meaning of the term, which is the major reason they cannot distinguish between a group of words that is either a common noun or a proper noun.

Next, Wafiqah Asnola, Elmy Maswandi, and Zulfadzlee Zulkiflee (2022) conducted a research on analysing language errors in student writing. According to the findings, the most prevalent faults in writing aspects are orthography errors. Mistakes in the use of capital letters, punctuation errors, and spelling errors are all examples of orthographic errors. Among the errors identified at the beginning of the sentence are the fact that the first word is written in small letters and the use of a large letter after the sign of a comma. In their research on the analysis of spelling errors in high school assignment writing, Anne and Saidatul (2021) discovered that students made several errors in the usage of capital letters. Common errors can be seen when students fail to capitalise proper nouns and the word at the beginning of each phrase but tend to use capital letters on common nouns. Moreover, in the study of Sari Sadiyah and Seli Ade Royani (2019), grammar errors in the use of large and small letters performed by students in English writing covered only 5% of the total. The common problem is that students do not begin the first word of a sentence as well as people's name is capital letter. The same result was also revealed in a study conducted by Reny Heryanti, Muhammad Hadi Sucipto, and Makmur (2017), who discovered that pupils' negligence to use capital letters was a significant mistake in writing.

The primary aim of studies on Malay language analysis is to address the poor mastery of the Malay language among non-Malay students. The studies of Dayang and Wan (2017), Rosidah (2015), and Shahidi and Rahim (2015), which studied the analysis and factors affecting the mastery of a second language, showed that the linguistic differences between the first language and the second language made it difficult for non-native speakers to gain proficiency in the second. The convenience of using the mother tongue in everyday conversation discouraged them from using other languages in daily life. (Noor Azmira and Noor Azlili, 2019). Based on a study conducted by Zaliza (2017), poor command of a second language

causes confusion in terms of using the correct language system in a particular context. According to Ooi and Vijayaletchumy (2017), environmental influences, interests, attitudes, and exercises are among the drawbacks of second language learning. This result correlates with a study conducted by Chew (2016), which states that poor second language mastering is due to a lack of encouragement from parents, teachers, and colleagues.

Thus, even though hundreds of studies on the morphology and analysis of verses among Malay native and non-Native speakers have been conducted, studies on the mastery of students learning Malay as a second language in the use of large and small letters have yet to attract the attention of recent researchers. As a result of the aforementioned findings, the researcher was inspired to determine the mastery of large and small letters in common and proper nouns.

Research Methodology

The design of this study employs a qualitative approach to data analysis. Respondents in this study consisted of 55 students in Year 5 from SJK(T) Kajang. Text analysis approaches were used to assess the students' mastery of large and small letters in common and proper nouns. In strengthening the findings of the data analyzed, the researcher also used the observation method and interviews with the study respondents and Malay language teachers at the study location. The researcher used a comprehension text written from the Malay Language Textbook of Year 3 SJK to analyze the mastery of letters in nouns. The Corder Error Analysis Theory (1981) was applied in analyzing the findings of the study.

Initially, Corder's analysis of language errors (1973) highlighted errors such as termination, addition, selection, and arrangement of elements in the learning process of a language. However, Corder (1981) has stated that errors in a second language also occur in aspects of morphology, syntax, and lexicon. The Corder Error Analysis Theory (1981) was introduced by Corder to analyze errors in the form of language use that deviates from the raw language system used by a person. Spelling, grammatical, designation, and terminological faults are among the language errors that Corder has detected. The three types of errors that Corder identifies are confusion, mistake, and error. In order to determine the types of errors produced by the survey respondents, the researcher in this study will implement a method of accumulating errors, identifying errors, and addressing errors, as well as evaluating or rectifying the faults discovered by Corder as a reference.

Results

According to Nik Safiah Karim et al. (2015), the group of nouns are divided into subgroups based on semantic characteristics of their words such as common nouns, proper nouns, and pronouns. However, in this study, the primary focus was only on the common nouns and proper nouns. Common noun is a noun that refers to a general thing, whereas a proper noun is a noun that refers to the name of something specifically, and the first letter is always capitalised. The two subgroups of nouns, namely the common and proper nouns, refer to a group of humans, animals, objects, places, and plants.

This section will discuss the findings of the study obtained from 55 students of SJK(T)

Kajang. Students were given a comprehension passage entitled “Percutian ke Langkawi”. This comprehension is quoted from Year 3 Malay textbook. There are 10 sentences in the passage, and the students are instructed to rewrite the following sentences using the appropriate large and small letters.

A. Tulis semula ayat berikut dengan menggunakan huruf besar dan huruf kecil yang tepat.

Percutian ke Langkawi

najwa berkunjung ke rumah rakannya, mei fung, yang terletak di hujung jalan dahlia. dia hendak meminta bantuan mei fung bagi menjaga kucingnya, si comel. najwa dan keluarganya akan bercuti di langkawi.

najwa dan keluarganya menaiki kereta proton iris ke terminal feri kuala perlis. mereka menaiki feri ke langkawi. mereka melawat ke tempat-tempat menarik langkawi seperti dataran lang. najwa juga singgah di pekan kuah untuk membeli-belah.

selepas pulang daripada percutian, najwa membawa buah tangan untuk mei fung. mei fung tidak mengharapkan apa-apa balasan. dia membantu najwa seikhlas hati.

Figure 1: Comprehension passage “Percutian ke Langkawi”

Figure 1 shows a small passage that has been quoted from a Year 3 Malay textbook. The primary purpose of taking this section from the textbook is because the students have learned it and they can correct the errors in the passage by using large and small letters correctly.

Table 1: Percentage of Noun Errors

<i>Type of Nouns</i>	<i>Total Errors</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>Common Noun</i>	9	3%
<i>Proper Noun</i>	289	97%

Table 1 indicates the percentage of errors identified among Year 5 students. The most mistakes made by 55 students in Year 5 SJK(T) were in proper nouns, which is approximately 289 mistakes, or 97%. Meanwhile, the percentage of common noun errors is 3%, which means only 9 mistakes were found.

A. Common Noun

A common noun is known as a term that defines something general. The term "common noun" can refer to anything, living or not, including individuals, things, animals, and locations (Muhammad Norrudin dan Mat Ariffin, 2018). Except at the start of a sentence, the common noun has the peculiarity of being written in small letter (Sulaiman dan Ahmad Khair, 2008). The common noun that studied in this research was used to refer to people, animals, things, and places in general. The errors identified in the common noun are as follows.

Table 2: Common Noun Error

COMMON NOUN	ERROR	TOTAL ERRORS
people	friend	1
animal	cat	2
thing	ferry	6

Table 2 shows the mistakes made by the students in the writing of the common noun. The results of the study showed that the students had a good level of mastery in common nouns. This is because, the findings of the study indicated that only 8 students made mistakes in the writing of the common nouns. The mistake that was identified was that the students wrote the common noun in large letters, especially in the middle of the phrase. For instance, as demonstrated in the figure that follows.

Figure 2: Common noun error – human

The figure above shows an example of a mistake made by a student in the usage of capital letters for the word friend, as it belongs to the common noun.

Figure 3: Common noun error – animal

Figure 3 depicts two students who wrote the word "cat" incorrectly. According to Tatabahasa Dewan edisi ketiga, the word cat belongs to the common noun and must be written in small letters unless the word is written at the beginning of a sentence. The mistake identified was that the students wrote the word cat in the middle of the sentence using capital letters.

Najwa dan keluarganya menaiki kereta Proton Iris ke terminal feri Kuala Perlis mereka menaiki Fari ke Langkawi mereka melawat ke Tempat-tempat menarik Langkawi seperti Dataran Lang. Najwa juga singgah di pekan Kuah untuk membeli belah.

Figure 4: Common noun error – Thing

Figure 4 shows the most erroneous group of common nouns by the students. The study's findings revealed that six students were more confused about whether the term "ferry" is a common or proper noun. The mistake found in this study was the use of a capital letter for the first letter of the word ferry. This indicates that, based on students' understanding, the word "ferry" is classified as a proper noun.

B. Proper Noun

Proper nouns are words that refer to people, places, and things specifically. A proper noun is a noun that refers to the name of something special and has a capital first letter. (Nik Safiah Karim et al., 2015; Muhammad Norrudin dan Mat Ariffin, 2018). According to Abdul Ghalib dan Muhammad Norrudin (2017), proper nouns are words that refer to people, things, animals, plants, or places specifically and must begin with a capital letter. In this study, mistakes in the proper nouns were found in the groups of people, animals, places, and objects.

Table 3: Proper Noun Errors

COMMON NOUN	ERRORS	TOTAL ERRORS
people	Najwa	10
	Mei Fung	13
animal	Si Comel	25
place	Langkawi	26
	Terminal Feri Kuala Perlis	50
	Dataran Lang	43
	Pekan Kuah	47
	Jalan Dahlia	41
thing	kereta Proton Iris	34

Table 3 shows the number of mistakes made by 55 students of the Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil Kajang when writing the word of a proper noun in capital letters. The results of the study revealed that the most significant errors were place related proper nouns, with 207 errors in total. Followed by the second highest error is on the proper noun component of the object consisting of 34 errors. The proper noun component of animals shows up to 25 mistakes, while

humans show up to 23 mistakes. The identified errors are as shown in the following figures.

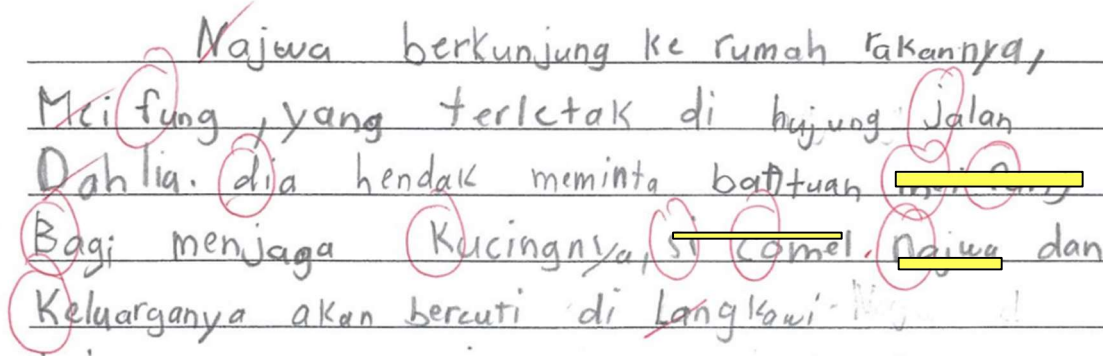


Figure 5: Proper noun error – people

Figure 5 depicts how the student misunderstood the proper noun of people. The identified mistake is in the words of Najwa and Mei Fung. A group of ten students wrote the letter 'n' on the name of Najwa in small letters. In addition, either the first two letters 'm' and 'f' in the name of Mei Fung are written in small letters or one is written in large letters. This confusion occurred because the students still lacked the understanding that the words of people's names should be written in capital letters.

Following that, 25 students made the proper noun error on the animal word component. The letters 's' and 'c' are written in small letters, which is a very obvious grammatical error. This error shows that the student does not comprehend that the term "Si Comel" is a proper noun that distinctly refers to the name of the animal.

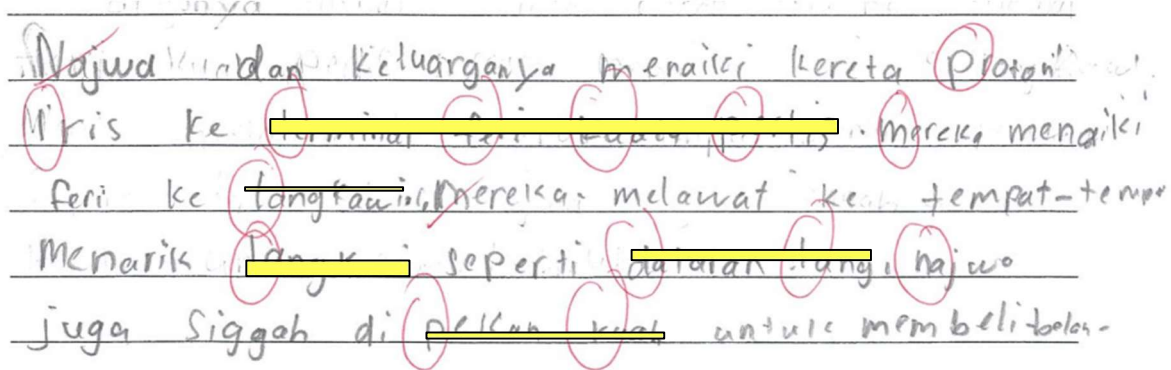


Figure 6: Proper noun error – place

The most frequent errors made by students in the proper noun that refers to a place are shown in Figure 6. The place specially mentioned is the name of that place. Thus, the name of the place should be written in large letters. A notable mistake was on the word 'Terminal Feri Kuala Perlis', which recorded a mistake from 50 students. As shown in the diagram above, the students wrote the words "terminal" and "feri" in small letters. This error indicates that students do not understand that when something such as a terminal and ferry is generally stated then it belongs to the group of common nouns. When the terminals and ferries are indicated together with the name of the area or state, the entire phrase should be written in capital letters as it specifically refers to the area. For example, "Terminal Feri Kuala Perlis" is the name for the terminal in Kuala Perlis, so the letters should be capitalised.

Next, the words “Pekan Kuah”, “Dataran Lang”, and “Jalan Dahlia”, each with records of 47, 43, and 41 errors, have the second highest rate of errors in the place component of proper nouns. The mistake in the words “Pekan Kuah” and “Dataran Lang” was that the students wrote both the names of this place in small letters. One of the factors is that they are unfamiliar with or have never heard the names of those places. They also did not know that it was the name of a place. Meanwhile, the error in the “Jalan Dahlia” was that the students wrote the letter ‘j’ in small letters and the letter ‘d’ in capital letters. However, the concept is the same, i.e., the name of a particular place should be written in capital letters.

A total of 26 students who wrote Langkawi in small letters were also noticed in the study. This mistake can be said to be the negligence of the students in writing the letter ‘l’ as the capital letter.

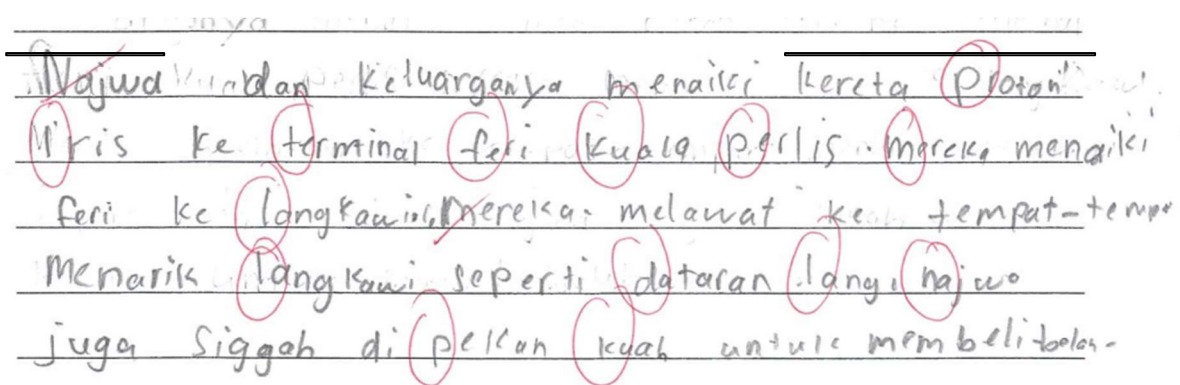


Figure 7: Proper noun error – thing

Figure 7 shows the mistakes made in the proper noun of the object. This error is the second highest error in the proper noun component. A total of 34 of the 55 students tended to write the “kereta Proton Iris” as “Kereta Proton Iris”. This is because the students do not understand that the proper noun for the object is only the brand name that needs to be written in uppercase.

Discussion

Based on the data shown above, the researchers concluded that the students' mastery of the use of capital and small letters in common and proper nouns was at a moderate level. The misconceptions, mistakes, and errors analysed by Corder (1981) can be identified in the analysis of student writing. Students are still confused about the use of letters for common and proper nouns. First, students tend to make mistakes in writing because they do not understand the meaning of a given word or phrase. The students are unable to determine if the word fits in the common noun or proper noun category since they do not comprehend the meaning of the given word.

Students' inability to distinguish between general and specific place names is also partly due to their lack of grasp of the ideas of common nouns and proper nouns. Students are still confused with the concept of using letters for the proper nouns of places and objects. This misunderstanding caused the students to make a mistake in determining whether the place should be written in large letters or whether the whole name of the object should be written in

capital letters.

Additionally, the students' native language, Tamil, does not employ the use of capital and small letters. Students are negligent in using the correct letters for the common and proper nouns and the first letters after the full stop. Additionally, students are facing difficulties in distinguishing between several letters in Malay, such as /c/, /k/, /m/, /n/, /o/, /s/, /u/, /v/, /w/, /x/, and /z/. Because the stated letters differ only in large and small terms, the students always make mistakes when writing the letters either at the beginning of the verse or for the proper noun.

Conclusion

Written communication plays an important role in evaluating a person's mastery of a language. Malay language proficiency at the school level is still assessed in part by how well non-Malay language speakers can write. Students who are non-native Malay speakers have a difficult time writing a grammar verse without spelling mistakes, which becomes a major challenge for them. Frequently repeated mistakes are common errors for students who do not understand Malay. The main thing that should be learned by every student is the concept of capital and small letters as well as the main components of a group of words, namely the noun. This is because every verse constructed at the primary school level starts with a noun. In order to generate grammar-based writing, students should be able to acquire and comprehend the ideas of common nouns and proper nouns, especially in terms of the use of letters. The mistakes of students in the use of small and large letters based on the common and proper noun components, as well as the analysis of errors in this study can be exploited by all parties, especially the teaching staff. The analysis given can assist teachers in examining student writing as well as in developing appropriate guidelines for the classroom teaching process to enhance students' comprehension of letters in common and proper nouns.

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