

An Analysis of the Use of HAVE By Adult Learners In An Open Distance Learning Institution

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Abstract

Declining mastery of the English language is a cause of great concern and consternation in Malaysia, particularly in the education domain. OUM seeks to address issue of learners' English language readiness by making four basic level English based courses compulsory to all undergraduate students. This paper looks specifically at the grammar of the language used by OUM learners in two of the courses mentioned above to ascertain their mastery, or lack of it, of a specific grammatical construction, the Perfective HAVE in present perfect sentences based on a corpus derived from their coursework. This paper analyses learners' use of the perfective HAVE in the present perfect tense a corpus of learner submitted assignment papers. This syntactical construction is chosen because it is generally regarded by learners as one of the harder tenses to master. The findings will show that while there are indeed issues the learners' mastery of the said construction, they are not entirely unable to use the construction.

Introduction

The decline in mastery of the English language is a cause of great concern in Malaysia, particularly among the education fraternity, including among life-long learning providers. The learners of OUM are predominantly employees in public and private sectors. For those in the private sector particularly, the English language remains the de facto lingua franca especially if the organization has international contacts and business. The English language is particularly important for learners in OUM because it extensively employs digital libraries to provide its learners with learning material. Such services are provided by international providers and thus their material is predominantly, if not exclusively, in English. While it is an official policy in OUM to allow learners to answer their examination questions and to write their assignments in either Malay or English, the learners cannot learn effectively in most courses without a relatively good command of English because of the learning material. The mastery of the English language among learners is also troubling because while there is conscious and persistent effort by several institutions to provide translations of English, and other languages, material in Malay, their efforts are inadequate to keep up with the speed in which academic material is expanding.

To address this problem, OUM makes it compulsory for all its undergraduate learners, and some post-graduate learners, to take a series of courses designed to prepare them for the self-reliance required in open distance learning. These courses are:

- a) OUMH1103: Study Skills for Open Distance Learning which is provided in English but allows the students the bilingual option in examinations and assignments. This course is not included in the data selection because the assignments are bilingual.
- b) OUMH1203: English for Written Communication which is a basic English language writing course. This course mainly focuses on providing the learners with the skill of expressing their thoughts in a orderly and coherent manner in the English language. This course is also not included in the data selection because learners hand in their assignments to their respective face-to-face tutors in physical form.
- c) OUMH1303: English for Oral Communication which focuses on providing learners with the skill to express themselves in English particularly in making presentations and discussions on more scholarly issues. This course is also nnot included because of the mainly oral nature of its coursework.
- d) OUMH2103: English for Science and Technology. This course is only offered to learners who are reading science based courses. Assignments from this course is selected.

- e) OUMH2203: English for Workplace communication. This course is also selected in for the data selection. This course prepares learners to write for the various work requirements at the workplace.

This paper looks at the work of the learners in two of these courses to “see” their actual mastery of the English language in this case with respect to their use of HERE.

There is much literature written on the state of the English language among Malaysians, specifically among Malaysian students but to date, I have not found any literature pertaining to the mastery of the English language among Malaysian learners in Open Distance Learning (henceforth ODL) institutions. This is not to say, however, that there are none. It simply means that they have yet to be found by this research project.

Malaysian students are said to underperform in English examinations at various levels but very little is known about the specific nature of their mastery of English. Some studies (see below) have shown a promising lead in showing that there is much to be known pertaining to learner’s mastery of English in specific areas of language. More specifically,

- Mastery of specific areas of grammar / syntax
- Knowledge based on actual work produced by the students
- Specific focus of ODL learners who are adult learners

This paper is the first of a list of papers that seek to fulfil the above gap in our knowledge on the matter.

Thus this paper will look at the use of HERE in the corpus comprising the assignment of ODL learners taking the courses OUMH2103 and OUMH2203. It should be noted that these two courses are taken by learners of the same point in their studies (generally this 3rd semester) the only difference is OUMH2103 is taken by learners reading science related courses while OUMH2203 is taken by other courses. This study utilizes the Wordsmith program to process the data and MS Excel for further processing. The focus is the use of HERE in two specific constructions. (a) the transitive VP and (b) the perfective VP. Interestingly this paper finds relatively few cases of errors related to these constructions. This does not mean however that the sentences in which these non-errors are found are necessarily grammatical rather it simply means that the use of HERE does not pose much problems for these learners.

Literature Review

Nor Hafizah et al (2013) used a corpus to examine the use of metadiscourse in tertiary level Malaysian students’ argumentative writing. They found that these Malaysian students are more likely to use textual metadiscourse than interpersonal metadiscourse in their argumentative writing. Intuitively and experientially this can be easily attributed to the style of academic writing taught to these students. In Malaysian academia, students are generally taught to use an impersonal tone and style when writing argumentatively and academically.

Alicia Philip et al (2012) used Wordsmith to examine the use of conjunctions in textbooks. They compared two corpora (their own textbook corpus and the BNE corpus). They concluded that Malaysian textbooks should use more correlative conjunctions than coordinating and subordinating conjunctions because the correlative conjunction is an easier construction and thus makes reading easier to the students thereby enhancing their learning and mastery of the English language.

Methodology

The data used for this paper comes from the assignment papers of learners taking the OUMH2103 and OUMH2203 courses in one semester. The data is converted from MS Word format into Txt format using Word2txt and then analysed using the Wordsmith Corpus analysis program.

The occurrences of HERE are grouped into two basic groups:

1. HERE used in transitive VP
2. HERE used as part of a perfective VP

The groups are analysed to produce the findings of the paper.

The corpus and analysis

The corpus used for this pilot research was generated using data in the form of students assignment papers for the following courses,

OUMH2103 English for Science and Technology

OUMH2203 English for the workplace

In total there are 557 files employed. There are actually more files in the original collection of assignments but some of the files appear to have been corrupted and thus unusable at the time this paper was written.

- Words in corpus 1,348,018
- Occurrences of 'HERE' – 4318

This analysis focuses on here because here can effectively appear in a limited number of constructions, namely

- The transitive 'have'. For example, "I have a car"
- The perfective 'have' – in perfect tenses and future modalities.

Interestingly, there appears to be only 41 ungrammatical uses of 'HAVE' in the 4318 occurrences: 1.4126%.

1	1,645	oid being bitten by mosquitoes HAVE eight way. First way, a	VP	ADA	wrong phrasing. Follows Malay grammar. "ada lapan cara"
2	1,671	r.For people at here,they must HAVE a knowledge about dengue	GG	ADA	VP is correct but NP object is incorrect: article usage.
3	1,672	Reduce, Reuse, and Reduce must HAVE at every area in Malaysia	VP	ADA	Malay grammar, "perlu ada di setiap kawasan"
4	1,678	s that, all the residents must HAVE cooperation with local authorities	VP	ADA	Marked construction: Malay grammar
8	1,679	ve. The local authorities must HAVE "gotong-royong" among ea	GG	ADA	Marked construction: Malay grammar
9	1,680	er control, each occupant must HAVE nets other than spray be	VP	S-V	subject-verb coherence
10	1,681	ident. The government also must HAVE schedule time table make	GG	ADA	Marked construction: Malay grammar
17	1,800	isease dengue fever. We do not HAVE other way except by writ	GG	ADA	VP is correct but NP object is incorrect: adjective usage
19	2,072	recycle that Malaysian people HAVE to aware. It is good for	vp	ADA	"have to be aware"
22	2,381	ent (1st Campaign) We should HAVE Waste excellent award li	GG	ADA	VP is correct but object NP is incorrect
24	2,617	ope that in the mean time that HAVE a dengue problem, there	GG	ADA	VP incorrect. Malay grammar 'ada'

25	2,623	e observation on the area that HAVE a stagnant water and sur	GG	ADA	VP incorrect. Malay grammar 'ada'
26	2,913	isks on us. In addition, there HAVE building construction de	GG	ADA	VP incorrect. Malay grammar 'ada'
27	2,915	solid waste In Malaysia there HAVE manage of the household	GG	ADA	VP incorrect. Malay grammar 'ada'
28	2,916	vement from the campaign There HAVE many purposes we trying	GG	ADA	VP incorrect. Malay grammar 'ada'
29	2,917	nd others. Besides that, there HAVE many are that disposed o	GG	ADA	VP incorrect. Malay grammar 'ada'
30	2,918	as happening now is that there HAVE more than 10 people (1 o	GG	ADA	VP incorrect. Malay grammar 'ada'
31	2,919	residents must make sure there HAVE no any place can let the	GG	ADA	VP incorrect. Malay grammar 'ada'
32	2,922	to survive for a week if there HAVE some water in the contai	GG	ADA	VP incorrect. Malay grammar 'ada'
33	2,923	ENT IN MALAYSIA In 2013, there HAVE some changes in governan	GG	ADA	VP incorrect. Malay grammar 'ada'
34	2,924	not, a few hours, hence there HAVE to be better ways. First	GG	ADA	VP incorrect. Malay grammar 'ada'
35	2,948	egypti mosquitoes because they HAVE adaptations to the enviro	GG	ADA	VP incorrect. Malay grammar 'ada'
37	3,415	example, at canteen we usually HAVE option to buy wrapped na	GG	ADA	VP incorrect. Malay grammar 'ada'
38	3,683	cially the water container, we HAVE responsibility to ensure	GG	ADA	VP incorrect. Malay grammar 'ada'
39	3,684	As a member of the public, we HAVE responsibility to ensure	GG	ADA	VP incorrect. Malay grammar 'ada'
40	3,685	abitat of Aedes mosquitoes. We HAVE run a 'gotong royong' as	GG	ADA	VP incorrect. Malay grammar 'ada'
2	1,420	toys and clothes you no longer HAVE a use for to others that	GG	NP	VP correct but object incorrect: 'any' missing
20	2,351	efore, the government should HAVE concern on the health of	VP	PERFECTIVE	VP incorrect. Should be perfective V+EN
21	2,364	clean. The authorities should HAVE proper disposing of	VP	PERFECTIVE	VP correct but object incorrect: 'disposal'

		the			
42	1,169	e fever. The suggestion that I HAVE listed are including: 1.	S-V	S-V	Single Object & plural VP
1	521	lean. The JKK Taman Desa Ceria HAVE criticized the residents	S-V	S-V	Singular Subject, plural verb
36	3,001	ach on zero waste system. They HAVE focus on liner of production	TENSE	PERFECTIVE	Incorrect perfective VP form
43	1,012	ion There many way governments HAVE produce to make sure our	TENSE	TENSE	Incorrect perfective VP form
44	1,082	to the recommendations that I HAVE attach in this report. T	TENSE	TENSE	Incorrect perfective VP form
45	1,090	spread in our housing area. I HAVE been visit the patient f	TENSE	TENSE	Incorrect perfective VP form
46	1,136	eps to assist on this issue. I HAVE communicate with some of	TENSE	TENSE	Incorrect perfective VP form
47	1,441	though government in Malaysia HAVE announce the treatment i	TENSE	TENSE	Incorrect perfective VP form
48	1,706	gue fever spread.The neighbour HAVE unite to clean up but it	TENSE	TENSE	Incorrect perfective VP form
49	1,713	n-Government association (NGO) HAVE taking an initiative of	TENSE	TENSE	Incorrect perfective VP form
50	1,848	yles in our country right now, HAVE contribute to the number	TENSE	TENSE	Incorrect perfective VP form
51	2,058	members, the Bangkahak people HAVE suggest to overcome this	TENSE	TENSE	Incorrect perfective VP form
52	2,258	the vicinity. Local residents HAVE conspire to provide coll	TENSE	TENSE	Incorrect perfective VP form
53	2,354	district. Other country should HAVE follow the method of thi	TENSE	TENSE	Incorrect perfective VP form
54	2,355	we Malaysian Government should HAVE follows and prepare the	TENSE	TENSE	Incorrect perfective VP form
56	2,648	nts, there are no changes that HAVE been occurred. The clini	TENSE	TENSE	Incorrect perfective VP form
57	2,914	ehold waste in Malaysia. There HAVE made a sustainable house	TENSE	TENSE	Incorrect perfective VP form
58	3,513	house or the outdoor. Next, we HAVE ask the Health Departmen	TENSE	TENSE	Incorrect perfective VP form

59	3,686	in cleaning up the bushes. We HAVE seeked assistance a coup	TENSE	TENSE	Incorrect perfective VP form
3	1,440	LE 3. Every house in Malaysia HAVE an own waste. All waste	GG	WRONG VERB	Malay grammar, use of 'ada'
11	1,689	ty in Taman Dato' Ibrahim must HAVE to joint for the "gotong	GG	WRONG VERB	Malay grammar, use of 'ada'
12	1,690	w the campaign or program must HAVE to start from the root.	GG	WRONG VERB	Malay grammar, use of 'ada'
13	1,691	nity in this housing area must HAVE to change their attitude	GG	WRONG VERB	Malay grammar, use of 'ada'
14	1,692	the enforcement officers must HAVE to immediate and increas	GG	WRONG VERB	Malay grammar, use of 'ada'
15	1,693	rah or private contractor must HAVE to pick up the rubbish b	GG	WRONG VERB	Malay grammar, use of 'ada'
23	2,578	dengue.as we know dengue don't HAVE fixed vaccine or somethi	GG	WRONG VERB	Malay grammar, use of 'ada'
41	3,877	analyze on the policies which HAVE been uphold in Malaysia	GG	WRONG VERB	Malay grammar, use of 'ada'

Discussion/Conclusion

Apparently, the use of HERE does not pose much problems to the learners in question. The data used in this study does not offer any particular clues as to the reasons for this but it does show that one source of problems may be interference from Malay grammar, particularly the use of ADA which can be translated as HAVE or GOT.

This does provide a possible clue to English language course designers in the ODL context. It shows that it may be prudent to take into account Malay grammar and the use of ADA.

Limitations

This paper focuses only on a small aspect of grammar but it does serve to show that perhaps the mastery of English among ODL learners are not as bad as some may say, which is promising.

Future Research

For future research, this project will seek to expand the corpus to include,

1. A more complete collection of the learners work in the two courses chosen.
2. More data from other courses where the learners are required to write in English only.
3. A comprehensive coverage syntactical / grammatical categories and forms.

This will serve to enhance our knowledge of the mastery of English among ODL learners which, in turn, will better inform future English language course design for ODL programs.

Works Cited

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