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Utilising Teaching Resources for the Development of Malaysian ESL Students' Sociolinguistic Competence

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Abstract

In order for language learners to communicate appropriately in a variety of social contexts and avoid misunderstandings or miscommunications, they must develop their sociolinguistic competence. The development of students' sociolinguistic competence not only relies on their interaction with other language users, but also their interaction with materials and resources that include aspects of sociolinguistic competence. ESL instructors need to not only choose appropriate teaching resources for the development of students' sociolinguistic competence, but also utilise them effectively in the language classroom. This study explores how ESL instructors utilise teaching resources for the development of students' sociolinguistic competence in the language classroom. In-depth interviews and stimulated recalls were employed in gathering data from three chosen ESL instructors from one institution. The findings reveal that these ESL instructors used alternative teaching resources to manage the lack of available resources and considered students' needs when utilising the teaching resources in the classroom. Based on the findings, it could be concluded that ESL instructors not only need to adapt and improvise their lessons to utilise teaching resources which are suitable for second language learners, but also cater to their students' needs to motivate them for further development of their sociolinguistic competence outside the language classroom. ESL instructors can use the findings from this study as a guide for the development of their students' sociolinguistic competence through the use of teaching resources, and further research could be done on this topic, specifically focusing on the development of teaching resources emphasising on sociolinguistic competence.

Keywords: Communicative Competence, Second Language Acquisition, Sociolinguistic Competence, Teaching Resources

Introduction

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was chosen to be implemented in Malaysia in an effort to lead Malaysians towards better proficiency in English

as a second language and develop their communicative competence (Ministry of Education, 2015). Since the adoption of the CEFR as a guideline for language teaching and learning of English in Malaysia, more emphasis has been given to certain aspects in the language, namely sociolinguistic competence. In the Roadmap, the Ministry of Education (2015) places emphasis on students being able to navigate discourse with others, and communicate appropriately in a variety of social contexts, in other words, having sociolinguistic competence.

Before discussing more on communicative competence and sociolinguistic competence in the teaching of English communication skills among Malaysian tertiary students, it is important to discuss what communicative competence and sociolinguistic competence are. The concept of communicative competence was formed by Hymes (1967) to address that language acquisition does not only entail knowledge on grammar or form, but also the ability to use the language appropriately and effectively in various contexts. Canale and Swain (Canale & Swain, 1980) and later Canale (1983) later expanded on the idea with the dimensions of communicative competence, including grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. Canale (1983) discusses sociolinguistic competence as having the ability to communicate appropriately with others, specifically in terms of using communicative functions or speech acts (e.g.: greeting, requesting, refusing) appropriately, as well as considering the settings, topic, and cultural norms of the interlocutors. Language learners with sociolinguistic competence would be able to communicate appropriately according to the specific social context, avoiding miscommunications or misunderstandings that could rise due to the difference of genre, topic, as well as backgrounds of the interlocutors.

In the development of students' sociolinguistic competence in the second language classroom, it has been found that the teaching resources, as well as how instructors utilise them, play a significant role. Teaching resources can influence student engagement as well as motivation in the language classroom, and this can have a significant impact on the development of their sociolinguistic competence. The teaching resources not only need to include aspects of sociolinguistic competence, but introduce these aspects in meaningful and authentic ways, especially with the students being second language learners. For example, a study by Shu (2019), it was revealed that students were unable to use appropriate language in specific social contexts because of the rigid and formal language used in the textbooks. Moreover, Sugar (2015) found that textbooks written by native speakers lack comparisons to the local culture, which could incite further discussions on sociolinguistic variations. Students would also be able to make connections between the different languages, and how their different backgrounds and norms may impact how they communicate.

Besides the issue with lack of available resources with sociolinguistic variations of the language especially in relation to local culture, some instructors admit that they did not properly understand the CEFR, hence causing them to avoid from choosing teaching resources that include aspects of sociolinguistic competence (Skopikova, 2018). Several studies (Sugar, 2015; Koran, 2016; Skopikova, 2018) have been conducted and it was found that sociolinguistic components are not commonly highlighted in teaching materials, and sociolinguistic competence is not often given emphasis in the English language classroom as it is rarely tested in examinations. ESL instructors need to play their role in emphasising the development of students' sociolinguistic competence in the language classroom. Using

teaching resources that already include localised and contextualised aspects of sociolinguistic competence might not be an easy feat due to the lack of availability, so ESL instructors must manage and adapt the teaching resources accordingly in order to cater to learners' schemata.

In the Malaysian context, a study by Ashiquin et al (2021) revealed that Malaysian ESL instructors are ready to accept the use of CEFR, but they did raise some concerns on the lack of available teaching materials and facilities. Further expanding on the issue with sociolinguistic aspects in teaching resources, Farehah and Salehhudin (2017) discuss the lack of localised and contextualised teaching resources available for Malaysians, seeing as the development of sociolinguistic competence requires learners to be exposed to and practice the language in a variety of contexts, and the context of Malaysians as second language learners of English is a significant one. A majority of the existing resources that include sociolinguistic aspects of the language were developed by native speakers. Students might not be able to relate to certain contextual and specific references made, such as idioms and norms that might not be applicable in Malaysian context. ESL instructors therefore need to address and discuss these differences in the language classroom when they use resources by native speakers. The issues that exist with the use of teaching resources in the language classroom, not just the choice of resources but also how they are integrated in the lesson, need to be further investigated so that Malaysian ESL instructors can best develop their students' sociolinguistic competence.

The Use of Teaching Resources for the Development of Sociolinguistic Competence
In the development of students' sociolinguistic competence, it has been found that the utilisation of teaching resources can have a significant role. Van Compernolle (2015) includes teaching resources as a vital element in the language classroom, specifically referring to learners' interaction with the teaching resources. Teaching resources play an especially vital role in supplementing the learning experience because English language instructors might not be able to provide so many examples of sociolinguistically appropriate language to be used in a variety of contexts, and these examples can be made available in teaching resources to supplement the lesson (Salemi et al., 2012). However, there is a lack of teaching resources that specifically address the teaching of English as a second language (Al-Qahtani, 2020). The lack of resources depicting appropriate examples specifically for second language learners becomes a critical issue especially for the development of sociolinguistic competence, being such a contextualised competence.

Koran (2016) found in their study that aspects of sociolinguistic competence such as speech acts are often overlooked in teaching resources, such as textbooks. It was also revealed that ESL instructors tend to avoid activities and tasks that develop students' sociolinguistic competence because of the time constraint and the instructors felt that more emphasis needs to be placed on grammatical competence. This contradicts Hymes' (1967) notion that the ability to communicate appropriately according to the social context is just as important as knowledge on grammar and form. Unfortunately, grammar is often given more focus in the language classroom, hence leading students to memorise expressions without understanding how to communicate appropriately in specific situations (Arif & Agnira, 2020). Moreover, there is sometimes a lack of authenticity in the language used in English language textbooks (Taguchi, 2011). ESL instructors need to place more emphasis on the development of sociolinguistic competence in the language classroom and use teaching resources that can

facilitate students in the developing the skills they require for the competence, which are appropriate to their own context and more specifically on sociolinguistic competence.

Taguchi (2014), in a review of the teaching of pragmatic or sociolinguistic competence, places emphasis on context and its significance in the development of sociolinguistic competence. Therefore, teaching resources need to be able to provide examples which are contextualised and localised so that they will be relevant and meaningful to students. Teaching resources need to be developed locally in order to depict appropriate examples for second language learners, specifically addressing the different backgrounds, settings and norms of the learners (Farashaiyan et al., 2018). The issue with providing localised teaching resources to students is prominent because ESL instructors are also second language users, and may be unfamiliar with certain aspects of the language (Wolff & Costa, 2017).

Sugar (2015), in a study comparing textbooks written by native speakers to textbooks written by local Czech writers, found that though both books included sociolinguistic components, the books written by local writers incorporated comparisons between English and their first language. This would allow learners to not only understand more about the appropriate expressions in English, but also make connections to their own first language. The discussion on the differences in culture and norms allows students to develop their sociolinguistic competence even more as they learn to consider the different backgrounds of native speakers and locals and how this might influence the way they communicate. However, as aforementioned, not all ESL and EFL learners get the opportunity to be exposed to localised teaching resources. In fact, Farashaiyan et al (2017) discussed the lack of resources to support the development of sociolinguistic competence in the Malaysian ESL classroom and recommended that more teaching resources include sociolinguistic aspects. In this situation, the instructors need to think of ways to use and adapt available teaching resources in localising and contextualising them for the development of students' sociolinguistic competence.

Besides textbooks, the use of teaching resources can include the use of videoconferencing and online platforms for the development of students' sociolinguistic competence. Ajabshir (2018) found that learners appreciate both synchronous and asynchronous online learning for the development of their mastery of speech acts. The students in the study mentioned that they felt comfortable to be able to use the online platform provided by the instructor for organising their ideas in written form before verbally engaging in the language classroom. Similarly, Cheung (2021) also found that students benefitted from being able to write their thoughts down on the online platform provided before verbally communicating in the language classroom and it improved engagement. Though sociolinguistic competence might more often than not be a competence used in verbal communication, it is vital that instructors allow the learners to write their responses before they contribute to the spoken interaction in the language classroom. This not only improves classroom engagement, but also allows students with more opportunities to practice the skills in developing their sociolinguistic competence. ESL instructors need to be aware of their students' needs and use teaching resources accordingly for the development of their sociolinguistic competence.

One of the ways in which some ESL instructors manage the lack of available resources for the development of second language learners' sociolinguistic competence is by using videos of

native speakers using English appropriately according to the social context. Researchers Utashiro and Kawai (2009) developed a software which comprised videos of native speakers communicating in English in specific contexts, exposing students to appropriate use of the English language. These videos can also provide students with examples of the language being used in specific contexts, hence facilitating in the development of their sociolinguistic competence. Furthermore, the use of visual media in the classroom can improve student engagement and motivation, which can lead towards students practicing and developing their communication skills in the English language (Patesan et al., 2018). It is vital that instructors are able to use any available resources, including videos of native speakers, towards the development of their students' sociolinguistic competence.

With regards to this, it is vital that ESL instructors play their role in not only choosing appropriate teaching resources that are able to provide authentic and meaningful learning experiences for second language learners, but also ensure that they are managing and using the teaching resources to best develop their students' sociolinguistic competence. Past studies have revealed that there is a lack of available teaching resources for second language learners which focus on sociolinguistic competence, specifically addressing the skills needed for students' development of sociolinguistic competence and also discussing the differences that might exist due to the differences in background and norms of second language users. Hence, there is a need to explore how ESL instructors are managing the lack of teaching resources for the development of their students' sociolinguistic competence, catering to them as second language learners. Moreover, seeing as the development of sociolinguistic competence requires students to practice the skills they have learned in a variety of social contexts, not just ones that ESL instructors provide in the language classroom, these instructors need to utilise teaching resources in motivating students to practice the skills needed to develop their sociolinguistic competence. Thus, this study not only intends to investigate how ESL instructors manage the lack of existing teaching resources for the development of sociolinguistic competence, but also how they use these teaching resources in motivating students towards practicing the skills that they have learned for the development of this competence.

Research Method
This study employed a qualitative approach, exploring the way that ESL instructors used teaching resources for the development of Malaysian students' sociolinguistic competence. Three ESL instructors from the same university were interviewed for at least three to four times in this study. All three instructors have at least 10 years of experience teaching English proficiency courses in this university. They were selected based on the informant selection criteria that the researcher had determined, including having a Bachelor's degree and Masters in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) or any other English related major to ensure that they have familiarity and knowledge on sociolinguistic competence as a subject matter and how it can be developed in the language classroom. These instructors were also chosen based on a discussion with the gatekeepers in order to find not only instructors who are equipped with the theoretical and pedagogical knowledge on developing the competence, but also instructors who are known to utilise teaching resources appropriately and effectively in the language classroom for the development of students' sociolinguistic competence.

The instructors were initially interviewed to build rapport and discuss their perception on the development of sociolinguistic competence in the language classroom. After that, their lessons were recorded and three lessons were chosen for stimulated recalls in which the researcher played specific parts of the recording where the instructor had used teaching resources for the development of students' sociolinguistic competence and discussed these instances with the instructors. The data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis and constant comparative analysis. Based on the interview transcripts, codes were assigned to excerpts, then subthemes and themes were formed with relation to past studies.

Findings and Discussion
Based on the findings from the data collection and analysis, it was found that the ESL instructors in this study used teaching resources for the development of university students' sociolinguistic competence by using alternative teaching resources to manage the lack of resources and considering students' needs when utilising teaching resources.

Theme 1: Using Alternative Teaching Resources to Manage the Lack of Resources
In managing the lack of available teaching resources for the development of students' sociolinguistic competence, it has been found that the ESL instructors in this study show videos of native speakers as well as use their previous students' work as a teaching resource.

a. Showing Videos of Native Speakers
The instructors in this study shared videos of native speakers using the skills in required in developing sociolinguistic competence with their students. Some of the videos were chosen by the course coordinators, while others were selected by the instructors specifically for their students. The instructors mentioned the uncertainties they face at times as a second language user themselves, and that the videos of native speakers provide students with appropriate examples of the language being used. Instructor 3 also used this opportunity to discuss any similarities and differences that exist between how native speakers would express something compared to how Malaysians would. The instructors note the lack of available localised resources for the development of sociolinguistic competence, and the videos of native speakers using the skills needed for the developing students' sociolinguistic competence can be significantly beneficial for them.

> "I purposely selected the video as it has utilised similar group discussion skills taught in the course as well as the language expressions used are appropriate to academic context"
> (Instructor 1, follow-up interview)

Using videos of native speakers allows students to familiarise themselves with appropriate language use, at the same time providing instructors with the opportunity to discuss the similarities and differences between how native speakers and second language users, specifically Malaysians, might express things due to the difference in backgrounds and norms. In relation to this, researchers Utashiro and Kawai (2009) developed a software for English language learning that included videos of native speakers because they felt that these videos would provide learners with a context-rich environment for the development of their sociolinguistic competence. Moreover, Taguchi (2014) notes the need for the instructors to provide a balance between the class activities, teaching resources, as well as instructor approach in the development of students' sociolinguistic competence. It is important that not

only do the instructors expose students to videos of native speakers, but also plan their approach and activities accordingly to best develop the students' sociolinguistic competence, especially them being Malaysian second language learners.

b. Using Previous Students' Work as a Teaching Resource

Another way in which these ESL instructors managed the lack of available teaching resources for the development of students' sociolinguistic competence is by using their previous students' work as a teaching resource. These instructors took recordings of their previous students using the appropriate language in specific contexts. These recordings were taken with consent, and they mostly comprised students completing the tasks that were given by the instructor. Instructor 1 admitted that looking for teaching resources that involved second language users of the language specifically using the skills that the students learned for the development of their sociolinguistic competence is no easy feat. Instructor 3 used a video of a group discussion conducted by her previous students and asked the students to discuss the language use of the students in the video.

> *"what I've decided to do is this… you'll have this activity in class instead butlooking at another group discussion. Another group discussion is actually taken from another class of mine"*
> *(Instructor 3, 2nd stimulated recall)*

These ESL instructors chose to share their previous students' work with their current students so as to provide them with appropriate examples of how to use the language in specific contexts, especially as second language learners within the local setting. This is very important because not only does it provide the students with authentic and meaningful examples, but they can also relate to the language used by other Malaysian second language learners. Past studies have also raised concerned over the lack of existing teaching resources for nonnative learners of English, such as Al-Qahtani (2020) who pointed out that materials that include second language users and are directed towards second language students would include aspects of the language that are not common to native speakers when they use English. Certain sociolinguistic variations would be applicable when communicating among second language users of English but not native speakers. Though some existing teaching resources may include aspects of sociolinguistic competence, there is still a need for resources which can appropriately depict the different backgrounds and cultures of second language learners (Farashaiyan et al., 2018). In the development of their sociolinguistic competence, students are expected to acquire the ability to communicate appropriately while considering others' backgrounds and cultures, which can be especially rich in a multicultural country such as Malaysia. Hence, exposing them to media which includes other second language learners using the skills that they are learning for the development of their sociolinguistic competence in Malaysian context should give them some ideas on how they can also use the language appropriately.

The issue of lack of resources for the development of sociolinguistic competence in the second language classroom has been discussed in recent literature. In this study, it was found that the ESL instructors used alternative teaching resources in managing this issue. In this study, it could be seen that the teaching resources can only play a significant role in students' development of sociolinguistic competence when the instructor is able to use and discuss the teaching resources appropriately in the language classroom. The teaching resources are

important, but it is vital that ESL instructors realise their role in utilising the teaching resources to best develop students' sociolinguistic competence.

Theme 2: Considering Students' Needs when Utilising Teaching Resources
The ESL instructors in this study considered the students' affective needs and visual learners' needs when utilising teaching resources for the development of students' sociolinguistic competence in the language classroom.

a. Catering to Students' Affective Needs
The ESL instructors in this study catered to their students' affective needs by considering their self-esteem and language learning anxiety in employing teaching resources. For instance, some of their students avoid from contributing to class discussions because of their anxiety, and the ESL instructors were found using different teaching resources to overcome this and boost engagement. Instructor 3 used the Zoom breakout rooms to reduce the students' anxiety, allowing the students to communicate in smaller groups.

> *"I find that students love it, love it um… and they… they participate better. I find that they participate better… even in the class which um most of them were very um… what do you call that? Do not active in class but if I break them, if I assign them into breakout rooms, they… they will communicate. They will communicate with each other"*
> *(Instructor 3, 2nd stimulated recall)*

Instructor 1 tried a different approach with their students, allowing students to share their written responses on Padlet before verbally communicating in class. This allowed students to organise their ideas and also demonstrate the knowledge they had gained from the lesson in written form. After that, students who gained confidence from the activity were able to share their ideas verbally with the whole class. They found that students were more engaged in the lesson and were able to practice the skills for the development of their sociolinguistic competence without feeling too much anxiety.

Similarly, the study by Ajabshir (2018) revealed that students were motivated to contribute in the class verbally when they were allowed to share and organise their ideas a forum. From the forum, they were able to improve their work to be more sociolinguistically appropriate, and then practice the skills verbally. Another study by Cheung (2021) also found that students benefitted from being allowed to provide nonverbal responses in class discussions. Students who were less confident or faced language learning anxiety were able to contribute to the class discussion, boosting engagement and hopefully leading towards them developing the skills that they had learned during the lesson. Thus, ESL instructors need to be ready to utilise teaching resources in catering to students' affective needs, especially in the second language classroom.

b. Catering to Visual Learners' Needs
It was found that the ESL instructors catered to certain learner needs when utilising teaching resources in the language classroom. One of them is the need of visual aids for visual learners. All three instructors used the PowerPoint slides provided by the course coordinators for students to have a visual representation of the topic they were discussing. Instructor 3 feels that the slides provide somewhat like a summary for the students to view.

"…because the slides… the content comes from the lecture notes, I just find that the slides um… it's like a summary of the lecture notes"
(Instructor 3, 1ˢᵗ stimulated recall)

As for Instructor 2, they feel that the slides can improve class engagement by getting the students' attention and allowing the students to make connections to any schemata they might have on the topic. Additionally, Instructor 1 notes than when she recaps or reviews the lesson using the PowerPoint slides, students are able to retain more of the information.

"…usually I verbally mention or recap. But this time around I feel that when you show them… I think it'll be clearer and easy. Maybe when they see it, would be easy for them to recall and digest as well"
(Instructor 1, 3ʳᵈ stimulated recall)

Based on the findings, it could be said that the instructors catered to the needs fo the visual learners through the use of the PowerPoint slides. Visual aids can be advantageous in motivating and stimulating learners in language classrooms (Patesan et al., 2018). The ESL instructors in this study were found using slides to provide a summary for the students, to review the topic with the students, as well as to boost class engagement. It is vital that ESL instructors consider students' learning needs, specifically their need for visual aids. Though this may be a simple and expected teaching resource, but the role that it plays should not be overlooked.

Based on this theme of ESL instructors considering students' needs, it could be said that students themselves play a very important role in their language learning, especially for them to be able to use the English language outside the classroom. They should have some autonomy over their learning and feel motivated to develop their communicative skills, specifically sociolinguistic competence, for daily and future use. The ESL instructors in this study have repeatedly mentioned that their decisions regarding teaching resources would often be influenced by students' needs. Therefore, ESL instructors need to be sensitive of students' needs and prepared to improvise the lesson accordingly with the use of the teaching resources for the development of students' sociolinguistic competence.

Conclusion
Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that ESL instructors utilise teaching resources for the development of students' sociolinguistic competence through the use of alternative teaching resources to manage the lack of available resources, as well as the consideration of students' needs when utilising teaching resources. The ESL instructors involved in this study used alternative teaching resources when developing students' sociolinguistic competence by using videos of native speakers and using previous students' work as a teaching resource. Besides that, the ESL instructors also considered students' needs when using resources for the development of students' sociolinguistic competence by catering to students' affective needs and the needs of visual learners.

Past studies have pointed out the lack of available teaching resources that highlight aspects of sociolinguistic competence, especially those that specifically depict appropriate language use among second language users. Hence, ESL instructors need to reflect on this and improvise and adapt their lessons accordingly to employ teaching resources in the language

classroom for the development of students' sociolinguistic competence. In this study, the researchers focus on studying good English language instructors to learn how they try to develop their students' sociolinguistic competence through the use of teaching resources. What the researchers found is that the teaching resources themselves are not standalone, and need to be accompanied by explanations and discussions, especially for second language learners living in a multicultural country such as Malaysia. Sociolinguistic competence involves the ability to communicate appropriately depending on the social context; thus, there are some contexts or instances that may only occur in a community of second language users, and not among native speakers. This is where the ESL instructors play their vital role in not only presenting students with appropriate teaching resources, but also providing contextualised and localised discussions for the students to reflect on and further develop their sociolinguistic competence.

Additionally, the researchers also found that it is important for ESL instructors to be sensitive of students' needs and utilise the teaching resources accordingly, as the students also play an important role in their language learning. This is especially relevant for the development of students' sociolinguistic competence, which relies much on the social context of the discourse. The language classroom might not be able to be an avenue for the large variety of social contexts that language learners might face, and ESL instructors might not be able to discuss all of them. Therefore, in order for students to further develop their sociolinguistic competence, they need to use English outside the classroom as well. This is why ESL instructors need to provide these language learners with a sense of autonomy in their learning by catering to some of their needs which may affect their engagement with the language and motivation to learn and use the English language outside the classroom.

Suggestions for Future Research
This study focuses on the ESL instructors' perspectives and practices in the language classroom for the development of students' sociolinguistic competence. A mixed-methods study could be done, with the development of teaching resources and guidelines for those resources, seeing as there is a lack of teaching resources for the development of students' sociolinguistic competence specifically for second language learners. Perhaps a survey could be done initially to identify what ESL instructors need in teaching resources, comparing it to the findings of past literature. Afterwards, teaching resources could be developed to highlight aspects of sociolinguistic competence.

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