

MASTERING MANDARIN ENDOCENTRIC PHRASES: A FIVE-STEP TECHNIQUE

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Abstract

Mandarin Endocentric Phrases (MEP) is a type of Mandarin phrase which is classified according to its internal structure. It is formed by two components which share a [modifier-head word] relationship. The modifier component precedes the head word it modifies. The role of the modifier is to describe or limit the head word. The Five-Step Technique is a simplified method of arranging words to form MEP. It helps non-native speakers to master the process of sequencing MEP. This technique is informed by findings from research on error analysis in the use of MEP among Malay students in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam campus in 2019. UiTM Malay students are influenced by their mother tongue which is the Malay language when they learn the MEP, thus they often make mistakes in the construction and translation of MEP. This Five-Step technique delineates the correct sequence of MEP into five parts, starting from the demonstrative pronouns, followed by the measure word, modifier or adjective, particle “de” and finally the noun or object. This technique will enable students to produce error-free MEPs and instinctively build their motivation to master the language. Ideally, Mandarin teachers can use this innovative teaching approach to create an interactive and collaborative learning partnership in the Mandarin classroom.

Keywords: *Mandarin Endocentric Phrases, Five-Step technique, Malay students, Mandarin Language*

INTRODUCTION

The Five-Step Technique is designed to teach Mandarin Endocentric Phrases (MEP) efficiently to non-native speakers. The technique is informed by findings from research on error analysis in MEP among the Malay students in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam campus (Mok et al. 2019). This technique delineates the correct sequence of MEP into five parts, starting from the demonstrative pronouns, followed by the measure word, modifier or adjective, particle “de” and finally the noun or object. By using this innovative teaching approach, an interactive and collaborative learning partnership is created in the Mandarin classroom which will not only enhance the mastery of structural patterns in Mandarin word order but also induce an active second language (L2) learning environment. The step by step technique will guide stu-

dents to place the appropriate words according to the prescribed order which will produce MEP which are free of errors. With that, students will be able to master the MEP easily and inadvertently this will increase their motivation to master the language. While this technique is currently being used at UiTM, it can also be extended to other institutions.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the second language acquisition processes, Hendrickson (1987, p.357) mentioned that errors are “signal” that indicate an actual learning process taking place and that the learner has not yet mastered or shown a well-structured competence in the target language.

UiTM is the largest university in Malaysia and it has the biggest number of Malay students learning Mandarin as a foreign language in the country. According to the statistics (Mok, 2018, p.161), there were 788 Malay students studying the Mandarin language in the main campus in Universiti Teknologi MARA in 1994. This number has increased to 11,752 in the main campus and all branches nationwide in 2016. Obviously, the number of students studying the Mandarin language has gradually increased over the years. And, almost all of the Malay students who study the Mandarin language at the university have no background in Mandarin. They are inevitably influenced by their mother tongue which is the Malay language. Therefore, they often make mistakes in the process of learning the language, particularly MEP.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction of Mandarin Endocentric Phrases (MEP)

MEP is one of the common and vital Mandarin grammar phrases. According to Mandarin language terminology, “*duǎnyǔ* 短语” is a group of words which are combined with certain structuring rules without the use of punctuation (Huang and Liao, 2012, p.44). Different types of “*duǎnyǔ*” are formed by different combination rules of words. “*Piānzhèng duǎnyǔ* 偏正短语” (Endocentric Phrases) is a type of “*duǎnyǔ*” which is classified according to its internal structure (Yang and Ying, 2011, pp. 233). It is formed by two components which share a [**modifier-head word**] relationship. The modifier component precedes the head word it modifies. The role of the modifier is to describe or limit the head word.

When constructing Nominal Endocentric Phrases (attributive + noun), the particle “de” is inserted in between the attributive and the noun. For instance, in the phrase of “*bā hào de xiézi*” (size eight-de shoes, size

eight shoes), “xiézi” (shoes) is the noun; the attributive “bā hào” (size eight) describes the size of “xiézi”. This literally translates to “size eight’s shoes” or “shoes that belongs to size eight”.

Comparison with the Malay language

The structure of MEP is different from Malay Noun Phrases. According to Nik Safiah Karim et al. (2015, pp. 376-377), the Noun Phrases in the Malay language are built according to respective rules and arrangements. Although there are some exceptions, in general, the Malay Noun Phrases comply with the following rules, namely D-M Laws or D-M Rules. D-M Laws means the sequence of elements described (D) precedes the element that describes (M). The element described is the head word present in the first position, while the explaining element is the element of the illumination that comes later in the second position. In brief, the Malay Noun Phrases adhere to the following rules: **[head word – modifier]** which means the sequence of elements described precedes the element that describes. For example:

Malay Noun Phrase	
<i>Head Word</i>	<i>Modifier</i>
baju (clothing)	kuning (yellow)
kasut (shoes)	saiz 5 (size 5)
kopi (coffee)	panas (hot)

It can be seen that the difference between MEP and Malay Noun Phrases is significant even though both type of phrases have a modifier describing the head word. The element as an illiterate to the head word precedes the head word in MEP, while in Malay Noun Phrases, its position is reversed, the element of the head word precedes the element which describes. For instance, the “hot coffee” is translated as “coffee hot” (“kopi panas”) in Malay language. In this Malay Noun Phrase “kopi panas”, the headword “kopi” (“coffee”) precedes the element which describes it, that is “panas” (“hot”). Therefore, it is not surprising that Malay students make mistakes when studying MEP because of their mother tongue or first language influence.

Previous Study on the Learning of MEP among Malay Students

Till date, there is a lack of research on the problems of learning MEP faced by Malay students. In the study on the error analysis in the use of MEP among Malay students (Mok et al. 2019), it shows that the major errors made by the Malay students in their learning of MEP are: (1) omission of the measure words, (2) reversed string order of the MEP, (3) errors in using demonstrative pronouns, and (4) excess of the particle

“de”. To overcome these problems, a few teaching methodologies were suggested with focus on rectifying the students’ weaknesses. The Five-Step technique was one of the suggestions.



OBJECTIVES

These are the main objectives of creating the Five-Step Technique:

- (1) Guide Malay learners to construct proper MEP when writing Mandarin sentences or scripts.
- (2) Rectify grammar errors made by the Malay students who often get confused or forget the proper sequence of constructing MEP.
- (3) Enable students to translate Malay Noun Phrases into MEP correctly.

METHODOLOGY

The Five-Step technique is a method to guide students to construct MEP by placing the words according to the following sequence:

A	B	C	D	E
Demonstrative Pronoun	Measure Word	Adjective	“de”	Noun
<p>Zhè</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↑</p> <p>Nà</p> <p style="text-align: center;">→</p>	<div style="background-color: #ffb6c1; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 2px;">双 shuāng</div> <div style="background-color: #90ee90; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 2px;">件 jiàn</div> <div style="background-color: #ffd700; padding: 2px;">个 gè</div>	<p>Size 6,7,8 <i>S,M,L</i></p> <p>Colour</p> 	<p>的</p>	

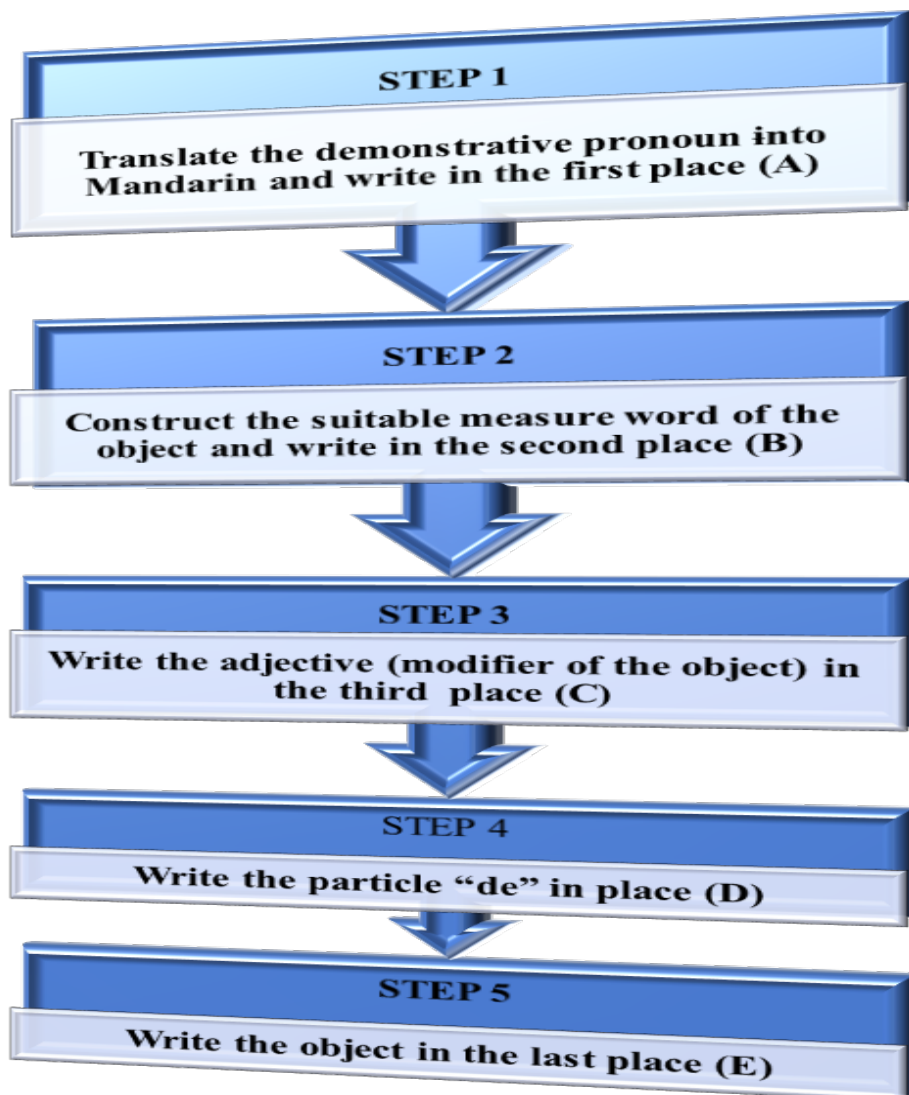
It starts with the Mandarin demonstrative pronouns which are “zhè” (this) and “nà” (that), followed by the measure word, the adjective, the particle “de” (which similar to “s” in English) and finally the noun at the end.

NOVELTY

This technique is specifically designed for Malay students who are learning Mandarin as a foreign language. Based on their first language knowledge, this approach will enable Malay learners to construct proper MEP

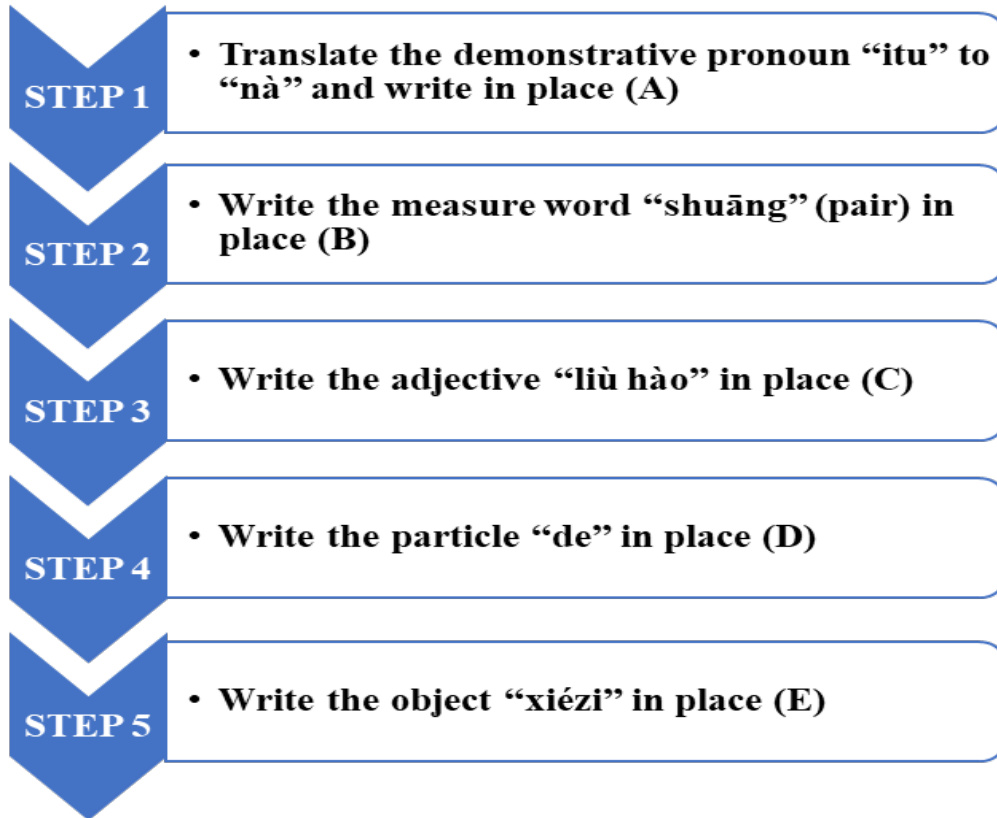
when writing Mandarin sentences or scripts. Besides, this technique can also be useful to help them translate Malay Noun Phrases into MEP.

*How to use the Five-Step technique to translate
the Malay Noun Phrases into MEP*



Example:

Translate the Malay Noun Phrase “Kasut yang bersaiz enam itu” (“That pair of size six shoes”) into MEP:



A	B	C	D	E
Demonstrative Pronoun	Measure Word	Adjective	“de”	Noun
Nà	shuāng	liù hào	de	xiézi

USEFULNESS

1. It will enable students to master the construction of MEP faster, easily and more accurately.
2. The MEP will develop students’ confidence to communicate in Mandarin.
3. This technique is a springboard for the development of games and quizzes focusing on students’ ability to rearrange given words in a correct order.
4. The technique will culminate in the development of an inter-active learning environment.

COMMERCIALISATION POTENTIAL

The Five-Step Technique is a customized technique specially designed to promote the learning of MEP. In its present form, this system is ready for use in Mandarin classrooms within UiTM and in Mandarin learning settings outside UiTM. This testing stage will enable the designers to incorporate feedback and take the technique to a new level. Once this stage is complete, the technique will have a commercial opportunity in the academic market. Ideally, this technique can be monetized as it can be used to design online Mandarin grammar learning games. Being grounded in an “error-analysis” framework, this technique has a predictive validity which will easily allow course designers to develop online games and quizzes to facilitate autonomous learning. In totality, this technique will engage not only its end users but also content developers.

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